DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 245 170 CG 017 542

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TITLE Career Unrest: A Source of Creativity.
SPONS AGENCY Columbia Univ., New York, N.Y. Graduate School of Business.
PUB DATE 81
NOTE 150p.; Published by the Center for Research in Career Development.
PUB TYPE Books (010) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Development; *Creativity; Economic Factors; *Job Satisfaction; Organizational Development; *Self Actualization; Vocational Maturity; *Work Attitudes; Work Environment
IDENTIFIERS *Career Unrest

ABSTRACT

This book discusses career unrest (defined as a sense of dissatisfaction associated with one's work), as a potential source of creativity. In the first of three parts, the author's point of view on career unrest is presented. Following a question and answer introduction to career unrest, the problem and the opportunity it presents are discussed. Four case studies of individual coping responses to unrest are presented. The potential creativity which underlies the discontent is discussed, focusing on career motivation and productivity. In part 2, the concept of career unrest is further clarified. Misunderstandings that surround career unrest (conventional wisdom, the pact of silence, and distortions from the written word) are discussed. Underlying forces that breed unrest in transactions between the individual and society, the individual and organizations, and the individual and the inner self are explored. A framework for thinking about career unrest in relation to life unrest is offered, and illustrated. Job unrest, career content unrest, and career self unrest are discussed in detail. Part 2 concludes with an analysis of the personal, organizational, and societal costs of career unrest. In the third and final part of the book, individual and organizational actions and methods to counter career unrest are presented. (BL)

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Career Unrest: A Source of Creativity

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Published by
Center for Research in Career Development
Graduate School of Business
Columbia University
New York, N.Y. 10027
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Acknowledgments

Most of what I have learned about career unrest has come from persons who have allowed themselves to experience and think about their own career unrest. It is these teachers whom I want to acknowledge—above all, the 94 men who took part in my research on career unrest among executives and professionals and responded generously and thoughtfully to my very personal questions. My thanks also to the dozens of passing acquaintances (on airplanes, at social gatherings, in hotel dining rooms) who were willing to enter into conversation with a stranger and reveal themselves with remarkable candor; and to the participants in seminars I have conducted in various parts of the world, many of whom spoke privately with me about their career frustrations.

Others have contributed in different ways. The center for Research in Career Development at Columbia University (Kirby Warren, Director, and Mary Anne Devanna, Research Coordinator) sponsored my research and urged me to write this book. Many persons, some of them not consciously aware they were doing so, contributed viewpoints that found their way into this book. To name a representative few: Posey Carpentier, Bennett Dolin, Willis Harman, Paul Keuchenius, Kenneth Michel, Virginia Oliver, Karl Pottharst, David Rimer, and Warren Schmitt.

Finally, in working through how to organize and express what I had to say I became much indebted to Kirby Warren, Burt Pierce, Denise Oliver, and Louise Wilson.

Career Unrest
A Source of Creativity

Introduction

Seeing the Potential

This book is for people who want to understand career unrest so they can do something about it. Certainly, that includes individuals concerned about their own unrest; it also includes organization managers, professional counselors, and others in a position to do something about career unrest on a broader scale.

Career unrest presents itself in different ways to different people. Still, through the different experiences runs a common feeling of incompleteness, a desire to get more out of work. The feeling is private, but, because career unrest leads inexorably to reduced productivity, its effects are public. The intangible personal experience eventually becomes a tangible economic event. And there lies the potential. Learn how to change the sense of incompleteness to a sense of creative contribution and the reduced productivity will take care of itself. That is the central message of this book.

Some Questions and Answers About Career Unrest

What Is It?

Career unrest is a sense of dissatisfaction associated with one's work. It takes several forms.

- If the dissatisfaction centers primarily on the work environment, it can be called job unrest.
- If the dissatisfaction centers primarily on the nature of the work itself, it can be called career content unrest.
- If the dissatisfaction centers on issues more within the person than in the work (for example, "I like my work but I'm starting to feel burned out"), it can be called career self unrest.

How Often Does It Happen and How Long Does It Last?

Career unrest is definitely more than a passing malaise or an occasional blue day at work. It occurs in episodes, with a typical episode lasting one to three years. However, this typical pattern sometimes shows wide variations: some episodes last only a few months and others run more than a decade. A given person may experience zero, one, or several episodes in a working lifetime.

What Kind of People Experience Career Unrest?

It can enter the life of any individual, including self-employed professionals, homemakers, and retired persons (in our culture, the work of retired persons is retirement).

There is no predictable relationship between career unrest and emotional health. Career unrest can occur in the life of an emotionally stable person; it can also occur in the life of an individual who shows signs of emotional difficulties.

Is It Always a Clearly Recognizable Experience?

Sometimes it comes as a sharp and painful awareness that something is wrong. More often, it comes as a dull, persistent ache which some people try to deal with and others try to ignore. When it enters a person's life in a very gradual way, it may not even be recognized for what it is. For example, the person who, without consciously realizing it, has begun coasting towards retirement is experiencing career unrest.

Where Does Career Unrest Come From?

Career unrest is a product of the individual's interactions with the environment, and its causes lie both within the individual and within the environment.

Any one of three conditions can lead to career unrest: normal change and development, excessive needs, or a weak coping system. The first two conditions can introduce unrest into a person's life; the third, by causing the person to operate less effectively, can allow this unrest to get worse.

How Does It Affect Productivity?

Humans work for a variety of reasons, some practical, some selfish, some altruistic. Among this mixture of motives is a strong desire to do something that others will see as a contribution, and included within the desire to make a contribution is the desire for personal satisfaction while contributing. Career unrest cuts off an individual's ability to make a creative contribution, and that hurts productivity.

What Kind of Actions Will Help?

Individuals have three basic options: they can make their current positions more satisfying and productive, they can change jobs, or they can change careers. To succeed with any of these three possibilities, they may need to make some changes within themselves.

Organizations have so many options for capitalizing on career unrest that they need to act selectively, choosing just those possibilities which have the greatest potential for their situations. An organization can focus its actions best by first looking at itself and identifying its unique strengths as an organization, and then finding ways to evoke individual contributions that feed into these strengths.

Chapter 1

The Problem and the Opportunity

A FORMER NEW YORK advertising executive now manages a men's clothing store on a Caribbean island, a former stockbroker now runs a boatyard, a nun has become a psychologist. Book stores devote entire sections of shelf space to titles that promise instruction on how to change jobs, or ways to relieve the stress of an unloved job while staying in it.

Ten years ago, we might still have shrugged off such visible traces of career and job satisfaction as the unimportant protests of a disgruntled few. Now, we are pressed more and more toward accepting these events as symptoms of a pervasive national attitude toward work. For many Americans today, career unrest stifles the sense of creativity and pleasure to be found in doing a job well, and this generates substantial personal costs.

Whatever its personal cost, is career unrest really widespread and does it really harm economic productivity? Consider the implications of comments made by various contemporary observers. Daniel Yankelovich,[1] a veteran surveyor of attitudes in business, contends that millions of people are no longer motivated to work hard. "Not only do they withdraw emotional involvement from the job, they also insist on steady increases in pay and fringe benefits to compensate for

the job's lack of appeal. The less they give to the job, the more they seem to demand—a process that . . . [threatens] the position of the United States as the world's foremost industrial nation."

Yankelovich is not the only one who sees a downward trend in the commitment to work. According to John Kenneth Galbraith,[2] "With industrial maturity and increasing affluence, people like hard work less and work less hard. Worker productivity declines."

Discontent is no longer the special province of organized labor. Arch Patton[3] describes the rising tide of executive self-interest which makes unhesitating loyalty to the organization an anachronism, and Albert Dunn[4] shows how the traditional values of the older manager clash with the new values of the younger manager ("Here's how we do it: follow rules, attend meetings, earn the right to luxuries before you enjoy them," vs. "I've got my own ideas and priorities, and I feel entitled to start enjoying luxuries right now").

Even older workers are not exempt from unrest. Peter Drucker[5] points to the conflicting motives surrounding retirement as a potentially explosive issue of the 1980s.

In the past, money has been a favorite antidote[6] for career dissatisfaction. Now, even that solution looks questionable. Wage and salary increases based on imaginary gains in productivity do not increase wealth and eventually lose their power to motivate; more to the point, decreased productivity means less money available for pay increases.

IMPLICATIONS

There is no need to reemphasize what is already well known. Productivity[7] in this country has deteriorated, and our competitors in the world economy no longer see us as the unquestioned No. 1. Nor is there any need to emphasize the

new importance of the human factor[8] in productivity, especially the creative spark and extra thrust provided by individuals with a commitment to the work they are doing. When career unrest erodes this sense of commitment, costs go up, productivity goes down, and the economy responds accordingly.

Beyond these more tangible outcomes, there is the question of how career unrest may be changing the meaning of work. What are the implications of living in a society where more and more people see their careers turning a dull gray, and where more and more people seek their pleasure outside of work instead of in it? What is the destiny of a society more preoccupied with how to use leisure time than with how to vitalize its work opportunities? We picture ourselves as a nation of workers brimming with energetic competence and ingenuity, but this may be an outdated self image.

HIDDEN SIZE AND HIDDEN COSTS

How widespread is the condition of career unrest, and what kinds of costs does it exact?

Size

Career unrest has two aspects, one visible, one private and hidden. On the visible level, career unrest looks to be no more than an occasional spark of rebellion. A few outspoken individuals are willing to say in public that they don't like their work; a few risk takers discard well established careers and begin new ones. Scattered events like these are interesting, but the total problem appears small.

On the private level, career unrest is quite another matter. In fact, research suggests it is quite common. A study[9] of more than 1,000 professional and managerial personnel showed that about five in every six had experienced at least one period of "intense turmoil"; of those reporting intense

turmoil, about 16 percent said they had never fully recovered from it.

My own research [10] on career satisfaction and career unrest among professionals and executives drawn from many different kinds of work showed 76 percent reporting at least one episode of significant career dissatisfaction. This research is described in more detail in later chapters.

Evidently, career unrest is widespread. It seems to occur among a high proportion of managers and professionals at least once during their working lives. Other studies document the discontent [11] among hourly and clerical workers.

If career unrest is so widespread, why isn't its presence more obvious? First, many powerful but subtle pressures operate to keep the feelings of unrest hidden from others and from oneself. Second, the inner experience of career unrest is often difficult to put into words. Questions and doubts arising from one's career often express themselves as uneasy feelings rather than clear experiences. Also, the dissatisfaction may be focused in any of several directions: on the work itself, on the work environment, or on other issues more difficult to pin down. Third, standard advice on what to do about career unrest tends to give superficial answers to important questions. This discourages self revelation.

Paradoxically, career unrest has also been concealed by efforts to explain it. The topic is still too new to have a standard vocabulary, so a cluster of conflicting and overlapping word combinations has grown up. Terms such as middlesence, midlife crisis, and midcareer unrest sound like different names for the same thing, but they aren't. Each of these terms was coined to express the particular aspect of unrest its author had in mind. Career unrest becomes whichever part of the elephant the author has his hand on.

These and other barriers to a clear view of career unrest will be explained more fully in Chapter 4.

Cost

Career unrest generates both human and economic costs. For the person experiencing career unrest, the human costs begin as inner forces, such as anxiety, depression, or loss of self esteem. These forces spread rapidly outward to disrupt the flow of interpersonal relations with family, friends, and fellow workers.

Human costs lead to economic costs. Inner turbulence constricts creativity; constricted creativity weakens work contribution; weakened work contribution reduces productivity.

Career unrest has a particularly heavy impact on older organizations—those which have passed the liftoff stage and are now substantial and successful. Whether these organizations are profit oriented corporations or service oriented government agencies, they can no longer rely on the initial burst of creativity that brought them into being. To remain healthy, they need people at every level in the organization willing to make an extra effort and to try new solutions. It is precisely this vitality that career unrest undermines.

The Cuttlefish Effect

Just as a distressed cuttlefish exudes an inky black fluid that clouds the surrounding environment, so a distressed individual caught in an episode of career unrest exudes a subversive miasma that clouds the surrounding psychological space. One person's private unrest spreads outward and downward to infect the work of vulnerable colleagues and subordinates.

Career unrest makes its presence felt more in terms of omitted actions than visible events. Things don't get done,

or they get only half done; problems are treated at the symptom level or not at all; opportunities are left untouched. The effects of these omissions tend to accrue unnoticed, well beyond the accountant's reach.

The eventual costs are real, and someone has to pay them. Initially, that someone is the organization. In the case of the self employed professional, the individual must pay directly. In the end, the costs are passed on to society.

THE PROBLEM

To recapitulate, the visible aspects of career unrest (occasional expressions of discontent by outspoken individuals, occasional defections to another career) are not the main issue. Rather, they are expressions of an underlying problem:

- Both research and practical experience suggest that the majority of valuable and loyal professionals and executives experience at least one significant episode of career unrest in their working lifetimes.
- This unrest exacts heavy human and financial tolls.
- Various distorting and concealing forces serve to mask both the extent and the cost of the unrest; therefore career unrest has been easy to ignore.
- Continuing to ignore career unrest means neglecting both a serious drag on productivity and a disaffection of the human spirit.

THE OPPORTUNITY

If career unrest has broad and costly implications for the organization and for society, then converting that unrest to career enjoyment would bring important gains. How might this be done?

Two Requirements

A successful approach to dealing with career unrest depends on two ingredients: first, a continuing effort to understand its characteristics, its possible causes, and its effects; and second, a willingness to see career unrest, not as a negative problem needing to be contained, but as a potential creative force needing to be released.

No effort to attack career unrest can succeed if it is based on superficial knowledge. A "let's do something about career unrest" program which assumes it is dealing with a standard *angst* that comes on stage at age 40 and exits of its own accord at age 45 will assuredly fail—and deserves to.

Such a view ignores many realities amply supported by both research and everyday observation. To mention only two: the nature and quality of career unrest at age 40 is not standard, since it grows out of what has been happening in an individual's life over at least the preceding 20 years; and focusing all the effort on the age 40 population can be a poor investment, since there is probably as much career unrest at age 30 as at age 40.[12]

The emphasis on career unrest as potential creativity rises from the conviction that when people feel frustrations and limitations in their work they are feeling the pressure of creativity asking to be set free. This applies to the 35 year old who thinks her boss is stultifying. It also applies to the 45 year old who has begun to coast because he doesn't see a more creative way of dealing with having topped out. As opportunities for promotions dwindle, and mandatory retirement at age 65[13] recedes into the past, all forms of untapped creativity become important.

Who Is Responsible?

If career unrest is worth doing something about, who should take action? The individual, certainly. Times may

be changing, but "You can't get something for nothing" remains an inexorable law of human affairs. The individual who expects someone else to take over primary responsibility for making the world safe for his or her self-fulfillment can look forward to a life of emotional poverty and disappointment. No investment, no return. But the individual willing to shoulder a major share of the responsibility for thinking about how to find the creativity in career unrest can vastly increase his or her value, and in the process discover self-fulfillment of an enduring sort.

The same principle applies to the organization. Understandably, the organization manager responsible for producing growth and profit in a world where that seems less and less possible might be unenthusiastic at the prospect of joining in a program for dealing with career unrest. Burdened with declining productivity, a flat economy, pressure from a public that suspects his motives, and an avalanche of government forms, regulations, and inspecting parties, he might well say "Thanks, but I'll pass up this opportunity. I'm too busy to add one thing more."

That is not a realistic position. Ignore for the moment the organization's share in creating the environment which pushes individuals toward career unrest, and think only of the costs to be avoided and the benefits to be gained. More than a decade of declining productivity in the face of steeply rising compensation costs illustrates forcibly that a change in our way of handling and rewarding career development is a necessity, not a luxury.

Career unrest has other ways of affecting the bottom line. Consider the medium sized, closely held company in New England which decided its successful but somewhat offhand approach to business needed to be tightened up. Accordingly, the board of directors brought in a conscientious, hard driving new president who did indeed tighten things up. Along with

many desirable changes, though, he brought in a thinlipped and joyless approach to work that spread rapidly throughout the organization. Within two years, several major customers had defected to competitors. Interviews with these lost customers evoked a standard complaint: "You guys still make a good product, but you've lost your enthusiasm. Your sales people used to come in here full of energy and good humor and they were a pleasure to deal with. Then they started getting all tense and pushy and we figured, "Who needs that?" As this example illustrates, organizations can create career unrest in the process of solving another problem.

In a more positive vein, a study of differing management philosophies in Japan and the United States shows that organizations that have learned how to provide some of the stability that individuals no longer find in society at large have increased their productivity over comparable organizations using a more traditional US management philosophy. Changing the way an organization looks at the careers of its employees can—and should—affect the bottom line.[14]

In brief, then, the bad news is that something must be done about career unrest or its costs will continue to escalate; the good news is that something can be done, and that well conceived efforts will be amply rewarded.

NOTES

1. See "The new psychological contracts at work," *Psychology Today*, May 1978, pp. 46-50.

2. Quoted in *The Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1979, p. 1.

3. See his essay, "The boom in executive self-interest," in *Business Week*, May 24, 1976.

4. "Case of the suspect salesman," *Harvard Business Review*, 57 (6) 38-52, Nov.-Dec. 1979.

5. See his essay, "The unseen revolution," in Max Ways, ed., *The Future of Business: Global Issues in the 80 and 90's* New York, Pergamon Press, 1979.

6. See D. Quinn Mills, "Human resources in the 1980's," *Harvard Business Review*, 57 (4) 154-162, Jul.-Aug. 1979.

7. Although accurate measurement of productivity is less straightforward than published figures might lead us to believe (see, for example, "A productivity drop that nobody believes," in *Business Week*, February 25, 1980, pp. 77-80), there appears to be considerable agreement that productivity has declined in the United States, and that the productivity figures published by the Labor Department over the past decade measure a long term slide that portends high inflation and a diminished standard of living for the indefinite future.

8. See the views of Economist David M. Gordon, as reported in *Business Week*, September 22, 1980, p. 26.

9. D. Schultz, "Managing the middle-aged manager," *Personnel* November 1974 , pp. 8-17.

10. Robert Oliver, "Midlife Unrest, Midcareer Unrest, and Second Careers Among Executive and Professional Males, Age 35-55 (Doctoral dissertation, California School of Professional Psychology, 1978. (University Microfilms No. 80-27,414).

11. A review of retirement issues can be found in Michael R. Cooper, Brian S. Morgan, Patricia M. Foley, and Leon B. Kaplan, "Changing employee values: deepening discontent?", *Harvard Business Review*, 57 (1), 117-125, Jan.-Feb. 1979.

12. The adult development literature has come increasingly to the point of view that major self reassessment occurs at various stages in life, not just at age 40. See, for example, Daniel Levinson's *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, New York, Knopf, 1978.

13. See, for example, James W. Walker and Harriet L. Lazer, *The End of Mandatory Retirement: Implications for Management*, John Wiley, New York, 1978.

14. William Ouchi has explored the contrasting management approaches of Japanese and US manufacturing operations and, in terms of output, finds a clear difference in favor of the Japanese approach. For an introduction to his point of view, see Richard Tanner Johnson and William Ouchi, "Made in America (under Japanese management)", *Harvard Business Review*, 52 (5), 61-69, Sept.-Oct. 1974.

Chapter 2

How Four Individuals Coped With Career Unrest

Career unrest exists simultaneously on two levels: the personal experience and the general condition. The personal experience creates stress within the life of an individual, and the general condition, which is the collective result of many personal experiences, creates stress in the organization and in society. Doing something practical about career unrest requires an understanding of both these levels.

Chapter 1 provided a brief look at the general condition. This chapter explores unrest as a personal experience via four examples drawn from formal research on nearly 100 executives and professionals, and from informal information gathering from several hundred others. Tracing the career satisfaction levels of these four individuals illustrates some of the important themes that emerged from this research and some of the difficult questions posed by career unrest.

CASE HISTORIES

Andrew, the Satisfied Stayer, Age 50

Ask Andrew how he feels about his career right now, and he quickly responds, "Oh, satisfied, very satisfied." Pressed for specifics, he expands smoothly and easily on his contented state.

It was not always so. Though Andrew classifies himself as currently satisfied with his career, and though he has spent all his working life in the same career (hence, the term Satisfied Stayer), his career satisfaction has had its ups and downs. Responding to questions about the early years of his career, his speech rate slows and his tone becomes more reflective as he returns to long-buried feelings.

"Everything was smooth for quite a while. Choosing a career was easy. By age 15, I'd locked on to engineering and just knew it was right for me. Both my father and my uncle were engineers, and as a kid I loved to listen to them talk about projects they were working on, so that was all kind of natural. My first job after getting out of school went well, and my natural ability plus the fact things were booming then in aerospace pulled me along pretty fast.

"It wasn't till I hit about age 30 that it began to dawn on me that there was the engineering ladder and the management ladder and I had better choose one or the other or someone else would choose for me. Also, I was beginning to have some second thoughts about devoting my life to building sophisticated war machines. This was a good 10 to 15 years before it was fashionable to worry about things like that, so I didn't get much sympathy.

"Both these conflicts took their toll, so I found myself moping around for quite awhile."

"What happened then?"

"Well, there was a chance to transfer to another project, and that worked out really well. I got into management and found it wasn't nearly so bad as I'd thought.

"But then, about age 37, along came another career problem, and this one was a real ego bruiser. Just as I thought things were really moving along, my boss got transferred and

his successor was a—well, we never learned how to get along together. Nothing I did seemed to please him, and after awhile that got to me. After years of priding myself on being the guy who could come up with one creative solution after another, I didn't have a fresh idea for months at a time. It got so that every morning when I walked into Building Four where I worked I'd feel my stomach begin to churn. I wondered if maybe I should bail out. Yet I hated to give up the reputation I'd made for myself and take a chance on starting over again somewhere else."

"Did you talk with anyone about all these questions and doubts?"

"Who the hell could I trust? Oh, my wife, of course, and nobody could ask for more support and encouragement than she gave me. But at times like this you need hardheaded advice from somebody who's been there."

"So what did you do?"

"Just gritted my teeth and hung on for nearly two years. It turned out to be the right decision, since I finally got out from under that guy and then went like gangbusters up to this director's slot. But that two years sure left a bad taste."

"How about your career now?"

"Nicely settled in, bumping along, still doing a job—but thinking more about the non-work aspects of my life, you know, getting reacquainted with the wife now that the kids are gone, actually looking forward to vacations instead of almost begrudging the time away from work. My career satisfaction is still OK, you understand, but if you get down to it, it's tailed off a bit."

Comment

Though Andrew classifies himself as currently satisfied with his career, his history includes at least two—and possibly three—episodes of career unrest.

The self-questioning at age 30 (Should I choose the technical ladder or the management ladder? Is the work I am doing really something I want to put my heart into?) deals with the content of Andrew's career as an aerospace engineer, and is therefore an example of career content unrest, as defined in the Introduction. This episode of career unrest was probably an outgrowth of the normal change and development that goes on at about this stage in life—a review and consolidation of conscious and unconscious career choices made during one's twenties.

Andrew lays his two year period of severe dissatisfaction at the door of a boss he couldn't work with. Since a boss is part of the work environment, Andrew's dissatisfaction is an example of job unrest. Dividing the responsibility for this dissatisfaction between Andrew and his boss is less important than recognizing that it seems to have shut down one individual's flow of contribution for many months, and therefore would have been well worth doing something about. Perhaps there was an unhealthy streak in the boss's approach to Andrew; perhaps Andrew responded in a way that aggravated the situation. In any case, neither Andrew nor his boss had coping skills equal to the task of sorting out the clash between them, and the organization around them lacked the sensing system to pick up and respond to the signals of this impasse.

A possible third episode of career unrest is implied in Andrew's description of his current career satisfaction level as having "tailed off a bit." Perhaps he is just redressing the balance between career and personal life in a way that doesn't

have much effect on his productivity. On the other hand, he may reflect a disconcerting result of my research on career satisfaction among professionals and executives. Taken as a group, those research subjects in Andrew's age range (45-50) who said they were satisfied with their careers also said their career satisfaction was significantly less than the satisfaction level they enjoyed during the age 40-45 period. Does Andrew represent a population of shelf sitters whose lack of job satisfaction weakens not only their own effectiveness but also that of those below them in the organizational hierarchy?

Barry, the Very Dissatisfied Stayer, Age 43

No equivocation here. Career dissatisfaction seethes within and seems to take on a life of its own, glowering back at the world, and fixing a baleful gaze on the presumably more successful, more powerful careers passing by on either side.

Not that Barry's career would be seen as unsuccessful and without power. Though deeply dissatisfied with the career he has pursued for his entire working life (hence, Dissatisfied Stayer), he pulls down a solid middle management salary, makes suggestions that are carried out by others, writes a good memo, and is fluent with quotations from the company's unwritten rule book.

And there's the rub. Knowing the unwritten rules, he sees his present and his future with painful clarity. "At 35, I got into a low visibility position and fell behind my [promotion] schedule. I'm doing OK, but . . . ." The sentence ends with a weary shrug.

What about the beginning years, when he was choosing a career? "That was a struggle. My dad wanted me to be a doctor, but I just knew I wouldn't be at home in the scientific part. He pushed and pushed and I bucked and bucked until finally I won, and he said I could do what I wanted. And

then what did I do? Instead of doing what I really wanted, I took his second choice—banking and finance—and gave that to him as a consolation prize. The irony is that I've been pretty good at it and done fairly well. It's just that I see men with what I consider to be less talent getting the assignments that lead to good visibility and promotion, while I get the dead-end assignments that require a good steady hand and good technical knowledge but don't really lead anywhere. I guess I haven't learned how to play the company game well enough."

"How about a change?"

"At my age, a job change is too risky."

"And a career change?"

"No way. I'm in work that I know well and that pays reasonably well. With three kids coming up to college age, I should junk this and try something new? No thanks."

Comment

Barry seems to have good technical skills but weak career management skills. He represents those who experience career unrest as a continuing sense of not making it. They may look successful to the casual observer, but they fall short of their own (largely realistic) expectations. Like bright school children who assume they will receive good grades but somehow never get the hang of what it takes to earn them, they wait in puzzled or angry frustration for someone in authority to perceive their true merit and confer the wished-for rewards.

Since the Barrys of this world usually see their unrest as caused by a stubbornly indifferent work environment, they would probably diagnose themselves as having job unrest. In a few instances, they may be right—in which case a change of jobs should solve the problem. More typically, though,

changing jobs will accomplish nothing. The new work environment will make little difference, since the basic cause lies in the individual's own career coping skills. Even supposing Barry is correct in believing that his talent and contributions go unrecognized, there is something missing in a mindset that can think its way through complex organizational problems but cannot extricate its owner from a personal career problem. Thinking more positively, upgrading Barry's ability either to connect more effectively with his present work environment or to get free from it, should make a great difference in both his career satisfaction and his productivity.

Note also the contrast between Barry and Andrew. Both went through a severe slump in career satisfaction during the late 30s. Andrew recovered, Barry did not. Why? The research to be described in Chapter 6 suggests that the difference lies in inner attitudes about the relationship between oneself and the work world, coupled with the presence or absence of the career coping skills mentioned above.

On another point, the way in which Barry initially chose his career probably got him off on the wrong foot. Research on the relationship between initial career choice and later career satisfaction (see Chapter 8) shows that choosing a career to please someone else augurs poorly for long-term career satisfaction.

Brian, the Somewhat Dissatisfied Stayer, Age 35

"How can I say I'm dissatisfied with my career when it's given so much to me? Here I am, succeeding far beyond my teenage dreams, tenured faculty at an Ivy League university, research grants coming in and publications rolling out, both at an acceptable rate, getting to be well known in my field—and yet, there's something wrong. It's like a beautiful, harmonious chord with an important note left out, only I don't

know what that note is. What I do know is that it's beginning to affect my work. I'm less sure now. It used to be I always could see the next two or three ideas I should be working on, but now it's like a fog has closed in. Sometimes I catch myself just staring off into space and wondering."

"Any particular things you wonder about?"

"Yeah. I wonder what it would be like if I changed careers. But the possibilities my mind keeps turning to are, are—well there's no other word for it—they're just plain ridiculous. Would you believe that the one I daydream about most is owning and running a tobacconist's shop? And would you believe I don't smoke? You'd think I'd have more sense."

"What's to keep you from experimenting with a tobacco shop while you continue to teach?"

"Oh, no. I couldn't do that."

"Why not?"

"I just couldn't."

Comment

Brian illustrates career unrest in its most paradoxical form: successful but unsatisfied. (There is also an undercurrent of the burnout syndrome—"I've lost my golden touch.") What lies at the bottom of this hazy but undeniable career dissatisfaction? Since the unrest relates only peripherally to work content and work environment, it seems likely that further questioning would show that the real conflict lies in the interaction between Brian and his inner self. If so, this is career self unrest, and any realistic or appropriate action needs to be preceded by a careful exploration of motives and concerns that lie below the conscious level. For example, Brian's refusal to consider the possibility of experimenting with a

sideline to his teaching career (which he could probably do without jeopardizing his faculty position) may sound illogical, but it is based on some unconscious inner logic that begs for attention and which it would be dangerous to override without thorough exploration.

Craig, the Changer, Age 46

"Yeah, I'm a career changer. But not the kind you read about in all those magazine articles, like 'I was a stockbroker with ulcers but now I've found happiness as an innkeeper in New Hampshire.' I've moved in the opposite direction. At 32, I was a school administrator in a well-to-do suburb, and on my way up in the education field. But then I started asking myself, How did I get here? and What's ahead? and I didn't like the answers.

"When I looked at how I'd chosen the education field, I could see that all that terrific effort I put into the decision-making lists of possible fields and reading about them, even interviewing leading people in each field—was just a big thick smoke screen. I chose education because my dad was successful at it, and I knew I was at least as smart as he was. Therefore, I was almost certain to make out OK in education and that would get me what I really wanted, which wasn't so much to succeed as not to fail.

"So I knew it would be education all the time, and the big agonizing vocational choice routine was just a charade to fool myself and anybody else who cared.

"And when I looked ahead, I saw myself not fitting in. I had to either give in to where I was, or make a move to get out. So a friend helped me to persuade a small consulting firm to give me a chance at a position with them, and in a few years I worked myself nearly up to the top of their organization. Then I got antsy again and decided I was ready

to take a chance on going into business for myself, and here I am, netting a hundred grand a year and climbing towards one fifty. If all that sounds easy, it wasn't."

"Was there any particular event or person that influenced your decision to strike out on your own?"

"Well, one important thing was therapy."

"You mean you went to a career counselor?"

"Nope, I went to a certified shrink. No big deal, I wasn't any different from your average neurotic overachieving upward mobile executive. I got the idea of therapy from a friend who had tried it. I was doing fine in my new career but my instincts told me there was something more out there that I was missing, and maybe I could use some help in looking at myself. Fortunately, I found a shrink who was just right for me, and working with him cleared away a lot of underbrush and opened up options I'd never considered."

"Opened up new lines of work you hadn't thought of?"

"Not so much that as it just opened up my thinking and my creativity and my self confidence."

Comment

Craig seems largely capable of taking personal career problems into his own hands. He has the recognition skills that allow him to identify the need for change, and the coping skills to negotiate two major shifts in career path.

Many would-be career changers are not so fortunate. They misdiagnose their situations and change careers when they should be changing ingrained habits and attitudes that will cripple any career in any work environment. Or, they diagnose correctly, see the urgent need for change, then surrender to half-truths (I'm too old; how will I put my kids through school? Better to be safe than sorry) and remain indentured to a outworn career that no longer has the power to

vitalize creative contribution. Or, they see the need to change, try to respond, but stumble in the attempt. Each mistake of this sort means lost contribution and lost productivity.

Craig and those like him can diagnose, prescribe, and act on their own. Most cannot. Contrast Craig's case with that of Barry, the Very Dissatisfied Stayer, who evidently feels too locked in to make a move. Looking at Barry's situation raises some substantial questions about long term career satisfaction, and about career change. Is it time for society to reconsider its assumptions about assigning responsibility for career change? Granted, there is something to be said for society's current position: "You're halfway through a reasonably successful career and you're not unemployed; if you're crazy enough to want a new career, it's up to you to make the change." On the other hand, Barry has two decades of responsible and solid performance behind him—less successful than he would like, but still respectable. Left in his current stalemate, what kind of creative contribution can society expect from him over the decades that lie ahead? Would a judicious investment in new career preparation and better career coping skills produce a generous payoff for both Barry and society? And if such an investment is worthwhile for Barry, would it not be even more worthwhile for the fast-track high achiever who, having wrung his or her career dry of challenge by age 32, or 42, or 52, has begun to go stale?

Approaching questions of the sort raised by these personal examples of career unrest calls for the best understanding we can muster, given our present knowledge. It also calls for a point of view—a position around which actions can be organized. My exploration of career unrest has led me to a particular point of view that needs to be stated unequivocally rather than simply implied. Establishing this point of view is the purpose of the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Under the Discontent Lies Potential Creativity

People work for various reasons, some of them practical, some selfish, some altruistic. Included among this collection of motives is a strong desire to do something that others will see as a contribution, and included within the desire to make a contribution is the desire to be creative while contributing. People are nourished by their careers if they believe they contribute through their work and if they feel this contribution drawing on their creative powers.

WHY PEOPLE WORK[1]

The desire to make a contribution is, of course, not the only reason people work. Economic need is a prime motivator for most of us. Self-gratification is another: work can supply a wide variety of personal and social needs—for example, the desire for power, recognition, and a sense of identity and belonging. These needs can be satisfied in either a healthy or a neurotic way. Still another motive is self-fulfillment, in the sense of translating one's potential into action. Self-fulfillment of this kind implies achievement, and achievement implies contribution, so there is a strong link between the desire for self-fulfillment and the desire to make a contribution through work.

Remembering that people work for different reasons and that the work of any one person probably reflects a mixture of motives, we can be realistic about where the "desire to contribute" fits in. It doesn't replace motives such as economic survival or self-gratification, but can exist side by side with them.

Allowing the desire to contribute to co-exist with more self-serving motives is not the same as accepting that desire as an important source of potential productivity. Does this desire exist in only a small number of people, or does it exist universally? The truth probably lies somewhere between these two extremes. My conviction is that acting *as if*[2] the desire to contribute in some way through work is almost universal is a far more realistic approach than acting *as if* the desire exists in only a select few. A theory of work motivation that treats humans as self-serving organisms, interested only in receiving, concentrates on a lower truth and misses the opportunity to tap this desire.

THE DESIRE TO CONTRIBUTE THROUGH WORK

Experience in presenting this "nearly universal desire to contribute" idea suggests that it draws two kinds of responses. One group looks past the obviously conflicting surface evidence and unhesitatingly accepts it as a flawed but powerfully valid truth. The other group sees only the conflicting evidence:

"Maybe Albert Schweitzer had a genuine desire to contribute to society, but the rest are all out for themselves."

"What I see is either people struggling for sheer survival, or people trying to feather their own nests with more power or more money."

"Contribution to society is the accidental fallout from selfish motives."

"If you'll say everyone is seeking self-fulfillment, I could buy that, but 'everyone seeking to contribute to society'? No way!"

(The people who make these comments, however, are careful to add that *they* have a desire to make a contribution through work.)

These skeptical comments contain some truth but they emphasize a pessimistic and limited view of human motivation. Our most significant actions spring from powerful assumptions which we act on *as if* they were completely true, even though we see their inconsistencies. We cannot prove them but we can use them. Our *as if* assumptions can be negative and self-protecting (it's a cruel world, our lives are ruled by conditioned reflex, people don't care), or they can be positive and expansive (all men are created equal, humans are innately purposeful beings, people want to do a good job).

Those whose fundamental *as if* assumptions are predominantly positive should find it natural to accept and use the essential truth in the "universal desire to contribute" belief. They can agree that the desire must exist in parallel with the need to survive, with self-serving motives, and with the desire for self-fulfillment. They are equally ready to agree that various conditions within the individual or within the environment around that individual can blunt this desire or distort it beyond recognition. And, of course, the ability to contribute varies with the individual. But they are ready to act *as if* the desire is always there, waiting to be evoked.

Bringing this idea down to a practical level, suppose you are an organization manager responsible for the output of a work group. Automatically, this means that you have a theory of work motivation which you apply to the people in your group. If your theory rejects the possibility of acting *as if* most individuals want to make a creative contribution through work, you have rejected the possibility of acting deliberately to foster this contribution. This means rejecting an important source of productivity.

TWO KINDS OF CONTRIBUTION

The contribution one makes, or is capable of making, can be divided into two parts. One is a large and relatively visible portion that could be labelled "maintenance contribution," [3] and the other is a small and relatively invisible portion that could be labelled "creative contribution."

The exact content of both maintenance contribution and creative contribution varies with the type of work. For most managers and executives, maintenance contribution is the everyday outpouring of face-to-face conversations, telephone calls, memos, meetings, and travel that adds up to getting the job done; creative contribution is the flow of ideas for improving, changing, and reshaping that part of the work content and work environment which one can affect. Creativity of this sort tends to be underestimated. It may not match the creativity of a Picasso, or an Edison, or a Stravinsky, but it is creative contribution and it is different from maintenance contribution.

Work does not consist solely—or even primarily—of creative contribution, any more than air consists solely of oxygen. Maintenance contribution is a major and indispensable portion of any effective work. Even the most gifted person puts far more time into shaping ideas than into creating them, and some of the shaping is sheer drudgery. Ask any successful playwright, or any top executive, or any nationally known scientist. Also, even the most demanding work has its necessary quota of inert detail.

Sometimes maintenance contribution can be interesting and pleasant. But it is creative contribution that gives work its meaning. Meaningful work and a sense of creative contribution are as interchangeable as matter and energy. Each is the evidence that the other exists.

CAREER UNREST AND PRODUCTIVITY: A LEVERAGED EFFECT

Blocked creativity has a drastic effect on productivity. Ironically, this effect is easy to overlook—career unrest operates in a way that hides the costs it generates. Consider John X., a middle manager currently experiencing a relatively light case of career unrest. His malaise, one of several variations on a basic theme, could be labelled, "I'm still climbing the ladder but I'm losing the thrill." He continues to work hard and to be well thought of, but a change is creeping in. Consciously or unconsciously, he begins to be aware that the solid satisfaction which once welled up so effortlessly as he worked has been replaced by a dull, obdurate ache. The job hasn't changed but his feelings about it have.

The desire to contribute is still there, but normal change and development have brought him to a point where he has begun to think seriously about what he has achieved so far in life and what he wants to do with the life that lies ahead. This creates turbulence in those inner conditions that permit the free flow of creative contribution. Hence, the career unrest.

Part of the toll he pays for his condition is a feeling of lowered self-esteem ("How could a high class producer like me get so bogged down?"). Another is the need for secrecy. John has no desire to compound his problem by advertising his condition.

Meanwhile, his family, his boss and his subordinates, and others with whom he closely interacts notice that their relationships with him demand more effort and therefore cost more. Costs of this sort are personal, paid off in terms of internal wear and tear.

A different kind of cost is paid by the organization that employs John. For some years, he has faithfully produced a steady stream of contributions to his organization. Most of

this stream—say 80 percent—has taken the form of maintenance contribution, which makes a moderate input to productivity. The remainder has been creative contribution, which makes a pronounced input to productivity. (If the 80-20 rule applies, the 80 percent of time and effort that goes into maintenance contribution generates 20 percent of his productivity, while the 20 percent of time and effort that goes into creative contribution generates 80 percent of his productivity.) The impact of career unrest on this flow of contributions is all too clear. Maintenance contribution dwindles but continues. Creative contribution dries up. Unknowingly, the organization pays this cost in the form of reduced productivity (John may be working as hard as ever, but his most important contributions have fallen off).

Inevitably, the organization passes this cost on to society in the form of increased prices. One individual's blocked creativity has cut off his major output towards productivity, and the intangible, internal, individual experience of career unrest has become a tangible, external, public event.

CAREER UNREST AND CAREER MOTIVATION

The relationship between career unrest and creative contribution is negative and powerful. Career unrest chokes off creative contribution; the inability to make a creative contribution through work generates career unrest. Creative contribution is the first casualty of career unrest.

The relationship between career motivation and creative contribution is positive and powerful. Career motivation allows creative contribution to take place; a sense of creative contribution generates career motivation and a sense of solid self worth. Unlock the creativity in career unrest and both self esteem and productivity will rise.

NOTES

1. Studs Terkel (*Working*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1972) puts it succinctly: "Work is the search for daily meaning and daily bread." A historical survey of different views on the meaning of work can be found in Lloyd N. Lofquist and René V. Dawis' *Adjustment to Work*, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969.

2. This phrase and the meanings behind it have a honorable history. Hans Vaihinger (*The Philosophy of "As If": A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind*, New York, Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1925) calls these "as if" beliefs fictions, which exist as conscious but fruitful errors. He contrasts fictions with hypotheses, which submit their claims to the test, and demand verification as an expansion of objective reality. Fictions do not purport to conform with objective reality in all respects but they do purport to be useful. Hypotheses should be judged by their probability, fictions by their usefulness. Vaihinger quotes both Kant and Nietszche to show the importance of the "as if" idea in their thinking. The "as if" concept also had a profound effect on Alfred Adler's understanding of human behavior as a purposeful striving far removed from the reductionistic explanations of Freud. See *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler* (New York, Basic Books, 1956), which consists of selections from his writings edited by Heinz and Rowena Ansbacher.

3. For a somewhat similar differentiation, see J.M. Juran's *Managerial Breakthrough: a New Concept of a Manager's Job*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1964.

Chapter 4

Misunderstandings That Get in the Way

Seeing career unrest clearly begins by stripping away the veils of misunderstanding that surround it. Three of the most important are: conventional wisdom, the pact of silence, and distortions from the written word.

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Conventional wisdom is that highly informal grab bag of opinions we use to answer questions we don't know very much about. These opinions are based on bits of experience, scattered facts, and things we have heard or remember reading. None of us can be disdainful about conventional wisdom, since we all use it frequently to deflect problems we are not ready to deal with seriously. But when an issue becomes important enough to face head on, conventional wisdom reveals itself for what it is: a gossamer web of partial truth, effortlessly spun and eminently suitable for its intended use, but far too fragile to bear the weight of honest problem solving.

Every important problem has its separate assortment of these partial truths, and career unrest is no exception. Sorting through ideas and bits of information gathered over some two decades of interest in the topic, I see the conventional wisdom to be a collection of answers to important questions about career unrest—what causes it, how to prevent it, and how to cure it if it has already occurred.

Four (Inadequate) Theories

Conventional wisdom provides four different sets of answers to these questions:

- The square peg theory—he * chose the wrong career.
- The instability theory—he can't keep his life under control.
- The midlife crisis theory—it's a stage some people go through.
- The Adam and Eve theory—after the Fall, work was ordained to be a drag; who says it has to be fulfilling?

These four different views give four different ways of explaining career unrest. Adherents of the square peg theory express their views in statements such as these:

- This career was never right for him. The career unrest is showing up now because he's finally willing to recognize the truth.
- If he had put more serious effort into deciding what he wanted to be, maybe things would have turned out better.
- He should have chosen a career that was a better fit with his personality. They have vocational tests to measure those things.
- Maybe better career counseling in high school and college would have helped. We ought to do something about improving that.
- Now that he's finally come to see that this is the wrong career for him, he has two choices—grin and bear it, or get out.

* Since conventional wisdom responds slowly to change, its statements about career unrest invariably refer to males.

Meanwhile, those who espouse the instability theory are saying:

- Career unrest is an internal, individual condition that is his own responsibility to deal with. Neither the organization nor society has any business getting involved. Besides, who wants to play doctor to everyone's psyche?
- Maybe when he was a child he got rewarded for playing sick once in a while, and now he's made it a lifetime habit.
- Prevention? More discipline, more self-control. They should teach things like that in the home. Cure? Work hard and tough it out.

Turning to those who base their conventional wisdom about career unrest on the midlife crisis theory, one hears such comments as:

- It's something that even good men can experience, and it's pretty much beyond their control. Along about age 40 they start thinking, "My God, my life's more than half over and what have I got to show for it?" They thrash around for awhile but eventually things quiet down and they go on.
- The emphasis on career unrest is all wrong. The real trouble is the midlife crisis. Some men have it, some men don't. Those who do are bound to find their troubles affecting their work. You can't prevent human nature from happening, and you certainly don't want your organization to get into midlife crisis counseling. So you just stay out of it.
- It's difficult to say what the cure is. If it's bad enough, maybe he should see a psychiatrist. Otherwise, he should just be patient and let time take care of it.

The Adam and Eve theory has nothing to say about career unrest. Since zero satisfaction is the norm, anything above zero is good fortune to be gratefully accepted, and anything below is simply our mortal lot.

These four collections of conventional wisdom about career unrest are not totally wrongheaded. Occasional grains of truth nestle among the abundant chaff of hearsay. But scattered grains of truth can be wickedly treacherous when they masquerade as total understanding. That is the specious lure of conventional wisdom.

Looking through the lens of conventional wisdom at the four case histories related earlier, one sees far more confusion than clarification. To be sure, the square peg theory could be used to explain obvious career misfits, but how does it account for Brian's dissatisfaction with a career for which he is obviously well suited? The instability theory may fit that small percentage of the working population who seem to mismanage nearly every aspect of their lives, but how does it explain the unrest and career shifts of a man who possesses Craig's sturdy ego? What does the midlife unrest theory have to say about the severe career dissatisfaction experienced by Barry and Andrew while both were still in their thirties, or about the apparent absence of any career unrest during Andrew's forties? Of course, there is the possibility of using the shotgun approach (If one bit of conventional wisdom doesn't explain the situation, maybe another one will), but that solution seems too whimsical to be taken seriously.

The human dilemmas brought about by career unrest deserve better answers than conventional wisdom can offer.

THE PACT OF SILENCE

The pact of silence is a tacit agreement to keep career unrest hidden. The agreement has been unconsciously negotiated

among the individual, the organization, and society at large. The invisible wording of this agreement varies somewhat, depending on the particular work group involved, and it may change over time. The contract for women is currently undergoing extensive alterations, but the contract for the male professional or executive has been in force for many years.

Career unrest in the male professional or executive is viewed as a mildly disreputable social disease. Like a scapegrace uncle's predilection for sins of the flesh, career unrest affects only lesser or eccentric members of the executive and professional stratum, and is best dealt with by pretending it isn't there. Both the organization and society at large generate powerful pressures to maintain this fiction, since each has a stake in assuming that the professional or executive enjoys unruffled career stability in his middle years. The potential executive is allowed to struggle with major rites of passage: becoming psychologically and economically free of his parents, deciding on his life work, finding a mate. Once these crucial issues are out of the way, he has become a full-fledged adult ready to settle into climbing his chosen career ladder, raising his family, and indulging in whatever peripheral activities these two major preoccupations allow.

Toward the end of his career, he encounters new issues of identity, centering around the somber realities of declining vigor and the loss in social position that will come with retirement. But, so the unspoken assumption goes, between the end of young adulthood and the beginning of old age stretch three to four decades of unbroken productivity. During this period, he need not expend energy looking within himself, since nothing is supposed to be happening there, psychologically speaking. Personal identity in middle life is no issue. He already knows who he is.

It is as though both the organization and society have joined to carry out a remarkably effective informal education

program which runs concurrently with more formal schooling, and which has its own graduation ceremony. The budding executive or professional stands invisibly assembled with his brothers for the silent but clearly heard graduation address. "You have completed the important decisions of young adulthood, and you have assumed membership in an elite group. Now you are ready to take responsibility for keeping things on an even keel, for solving difficult problems, for increasing the GNP, and for taking care of the future. Accept this responsibility and you shall reap growth and self-fulfillment. Ignore it and you shall be forever shamed. Remember, we need you. Don't let anything interfere with your work."

The executive or professional, rather pleased by this conferral of contemporary knighthood, salutes, sets his jaw firmly, and moves off along the appointed path, determined to keep the faith and be undeterred. Given this sense of noblesse oblige, career unrest becomes a traitorous, unmanly shortcoming, acknowledged only by those of lesser breed. The true executive or professional perseveres, his external life in order, his internal life a turbulent sea, his lips sealed by visions of honor—and by the fear of losing position in the race to success.

Slowly, ever so slowly, this quiet conspiracy is beginning to change. Much has been written and said in recent years about the need to recognize the inevitability of change throughout adulthood, and nearly everyone can recount a favorite story about a friend or acquaintance who jumped ship to become happily engaged in another line of work. So, bits of the problem are becoming visible.

Still, these are only beginnings, and they do no more than hint at what research is beginning to make clear: a high proportion of executives and professionals experience career unrest at least once during their careers, but a pact of silence keeps the unrest under cover, and conceals its significant human and economic cost.

DISTORTIONS FROM THE WRITTEN WORD

Books and articles written to explain career unrest can easily become little more than collections of stories about "how I changed my career and my life in a dramatic way." Often, Paul Gauguin is cited as an example of one who dealt decisively with career unrest (respectable stockbroker forsakes career and family in Paris for painting and Polynesian beauties in Tahiti). Presenting career unrest in this way, while understandably tempting as a means of capturing the reader's interest, puts the spotlight in the wrong place. By and large, the Gauguins of this world will take care of themselves. It is the sober-minded, contemporary knights described above who need attention. Besides, good solutions to career unrest do not always require dramatic changes.

Another source of distortion lies in the ramshackle vocabulary that has grown up around career unrest. Terms such as metapause, male menopause, middlescence crisis, climacteric, midcareer unrest, and career crisis form overlapping, ill-defined, and sometimes contradictory pictures of what midlife unrest and career unrest include and exclude. If those of us who have something to say on these issues could agree on a more consistent and standardized language, the cause of clarity would be considerably advanced.

Often, this confusion of vocabulary is due to the persistent tendency to jumble midlife unrest, career unrest, and career change together and treat them as one general condition. This lulls the reader into accepting career unrest as the middle step in a seemingly inviolate A-B-C- progression: a, Midlife unrest generates career unrest; b, Career unrest generates career change; c, Career change generates happiness. On occasion, this progression actually does reflect reality, but far more often it is a badly skewed representation that leads to false conclusions.

Chapter 5

Underlying Forces That Breed Unrest

As with any complex issue, there is no single idea that will completely explain career unrest and the conditions that produce it. One way to describe the forces and conditions that underlie career unrest is to think of them as the cumulative effect from millions of individual work transactions gone wrong.

During our careers, all of us engage in many such transactions, most of them set up, carried out, and evaluated on a subconscious level. Each transaction begins like this: "I contract to make Contribution A, and I expect to get Reward Z." (Reward Z usually translates into money + other tangibles + intangibles.)

Any one of the following three conditions will throw the transaction out of balance:

- In my opinion, I didn't get Reward Z.
- I got Reward Z, but it didn't give me the satisfaction I expected.
- I've been getting Reward Z, plus steadily increasing pay, for the past ten years. It used to satisfy me. Now it doesn't.

These unsatisfying transactions can be grouped into major clusters. There are transactions between the individual and society, between the individual and the organization, and between the individual and his or her inner self.

TRANSACTIONS BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

On the broadest level, a sense of unrest in work can be traced back to the massive ebb and flow of transactions between the individual and society, and the changing nature of these transactions in recent years. Nearly half a century ago, Emile Durkheim [1] identified a chain of events that began with the Industrial Revolution and that continues to operate with increasing momentum in all industrialized societies. The chain begins with the division of labor.

Division of labor results in transferable skills that allow the individual to become geographically mobile. This mobility, plus economies of scale and transportation, tends to draw people away from villages and toward cities. Consequently, they are drawn away from an environment characterized by a strong sense of community and interdependence and toward an environment characterized by a sense of anonymity and separateness. Work becomes more and more a separate segment of life, detached from the whole person.

An Expanding World in a Shrinking Space

Together, division of labor, mobility, and urbanization act to force a rapidly expanding psychological world (new values, new customs, new possibilities, new modes of interaction) into a shrinking physical space. Individuals are crowded into cities and required to live together. The collection of values they bring into this new, much larger community from many small communities presents each person with a puzzling, perhaps even an overwhelmingly wide, spectrum of values.

This subjects the individual to maximum stress at a moment of maximum vulnerability. At the very time when common values and objectives could help strangers work out how to get along together, these common values and goals are absent; at the very time when greater physical space and a tranquil setting would provide desperately needed insulation from the turbulence of change, they have been stripped away.

But haven't we learned how to control these effects? This movement from an agricultural society to an industrialized society has been going on for many years. Surely, we must already have won the struggle to reshape old, small-community values to fit the requirements and customs of the megalopolis.

Perhaps. But it is my point of view that we certainly have not yet done so, and that long term work transactions between the individual and society are becoming increasingly difficult to carry out. Even if the rate of change in work and the work environment were to level off, a backlog of accrued dislocation would be present for years to come. Humans have been clever enough to develop a complex goods and services economy that generates material well-being. Now, they must also be clever enough to develop a psychological economy that generates a sense of stability and deep satisfaction.

New Pressures

Along with the emergence of a technological society that coexists with and accentuates the psychological pressures of the industrial society, have come two developments that imply new stresses: energy, which powers the industrial society, has become expensive; information, which powers the technological society, has plunged dramatically in cost (for example, the $100 calculator of 1970 can, in 1980, be found at the corner drugstore for $9.95).

The implications of the former development seem obvious. If productivity is the result of energy combined with human effort and ingenuity, more expensive energy without an increase in productivity means that less surplus will be available to reward the human effort. This decreased reward could unleash a torrent of career unrest currently held in check by the 20th century custom of accepting financial reward in lieu of career satisfaction. Material well being often functions to wall off the dissatisfaction rising from the individual's unbalanced work transactions with society.

Though the implications of cheap and abundant information are more speculative, it is clear that increased information does not guarantee increased control and increased efficiency. A cornucopia of information and highly sophisticated information tools could actually inhibit the creative teamwork that generates both career motivation and productivity. Prophets[2] who, having drunk deeply of an elixir brewed from silicon chips and microdots, portray the executive of the future as sitting at home and manipulating his empire by means of a portable computer, show a startling innocence about the multidimensional nature of communication. Can the career satisfaction derived from face to face interactions with colleagues, customers, and competitors be replaced by conversation via display screen? It seems unlikely.

We have not fully defined, much less solved, the problems of living in a high technology society. A small segment of our population has attempted to take the solution into its own hands by remaining in—or deliberately returning to—a simple, more self sufficient life style. But most of us continue to transact with, contribute to, and depend on some sliver of technology.

That means we wrestle almost continuously with the dilemma of how to fit an expanding psychological world into a physical environment that is frenetic, noisy, and polluted.

Small wonder that so many of us seek out mountains, lakes, or oceanside as vacation spots—and small wonder that we find these places of refuge crowded when we get there.

Career Unrest as Feeling Rootless

The net result is anomie, a sense of rootless living in a society that has little to offer in the way of belief or norms for behavior. Career unrest is an expression of anomie. If Durkheim's analysis is correct, the forces that produce this sense of rootlessness extend into the future. As the specialization of knowledge and skills increases, carrying the division of labor upward on an ever ascending curve, rootless living and career unrest will become ever more prevalent, ever more visible, ever more costly.

If career unrest is a byproduct of a highly developed economy, it follows that growing technology means growing career unrest. The more advanced the society, the more serious the condition. The level of unrest in highly developed economies such as ours is already significant and seems likely to increase.

TRANSACTIONS BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE ORGANIZATION

Though a sense of rootless living is an important source of career unrest, it is by no means the only one. Moving from the level of individual-society transactions to the level of individual-organization transactions brings into view other forces which can move the individual toward career unrest.

Career Unrest as Feeling Boxed In

One force toward career unrest is a private perception of the work world that turns up persistently in surveys of executives and professionals: "I feel boxed in. My work limits me in ways that push me toward either frustration or stagnation." Perceptions of this sort may not always square

with reality, but they exist nonetheless. It is not difficult to identify the individual-organization transactions that have the power to generate such feelings. Simultaneous pressures to produce results, yet not break written and unwritten rules; promotion to a job that is a poor fit for the individual's talents; lack of promotion that results in boredom; constant geographical transfers that exert both personal and professional stress; changing organizational needs that render once desirable skills obsolete—these are experiences that require no elucidation for those who have lived through them.

Underlying transactions of this sort is the persistent presence of the parent-child relationship between the organization and the individual, a presence that colors all negotiations they undertake with one another.

Since these transactions continue to pose inescapable conflicts for individuals in even the most progressive organizations, they will be treated in more depth in succeeding chapters. For the moment, it is sufficient to keep in mind that many ordinary transactions between the individual and the organization can, if blindly handled, increase the sense of unrest; yet, if skillfully handled, these same transactions can lead to a release of creative energy that benefits both the individual and the organization.

TRANSACTIONS BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE INNER SELF

A third group of transactions that can and do produce a sense of career unrest are those which the individual carries on with the inner self. All of us engage in a running, unspoken dialogue with that inner self, much of it conducted on a level well beyond the reach of our conscious minds. We talk incessantly with ourselves about self-expectations, and how well we think we are meeting these expectations; about the tangible and intangible contributions we see ourselves

making, and how well we think these contributions have been rewarded; and about tradeoffs between work life and personal life.

As if this weren't difficult enough, the inner dialogue must also deal with the continuing metamorphosis of adult development (or, to put it more plainly, with what changes inside as one grows older).

Career Unrest as the Desire for Self-Fulfillment

Of all the potential sources of career unrest arising from the transactions between the individual and the inner self, the one most likely to be a potent and growing force during the coming decade is the desire for self-fulfillment. The exact specifications for self-fulfillment, often called self-actualization, self-realization, or personal growth, are subject to individual interpretation. One person's self-fulfillment can be another's disaster. In the popular mind, however, there seems to be general agreement about the central idea, often expressed in phrases such as "doing things my own way," "finding myself," "not worrying too much about what other people think," "accepting others but not being too dependent on them."

The fact that these sentiments bear only a passing resemblance to Abraham Maslow's [3] carefully developed idea of self-actualization does not make them inaccurate reflections of self-fulfillment in the popular view. The phrases suggest a search for more intimate relationships and a lesser dependence on material success. Listening carefully, though, one can hear an unexpected theme: that of the early American frontiersman, carving out his destiny on the open plains. Maslow probably never intended self-fulfillment to be a call to rugged individualism, but the overtones are there. (Cigarette advertising has captured this hidden side of self-fulfillment with exquisite accuracy.) Perhaps one significant element of career unrest is the unconscious search for another frontier [4] where the self

can roam at will, free of professional and organizational demands,[5] and responsive to the still active American frontier ethic.

Whatever we may take it to mean, the search to achieve self-fulfillment is widespread, and often interferes with career satisfaction. Recent conversations with two successful men in their early thirties illustrate the point.

One of the two, an advertising executive comfortably ensconced in a well appointed office, agreed that his job had been going very well, but seemed more interested in talking about the complexities of getting started in a real estate investment program while continuing to meet the expenses required by alimony payments and his life style.

The other, a dentist with a well established practice, spoke wistfully of his brother's life as a garage owner in Oregon, and wondered aloud if he could summon the nerve to relocate in a small town.

Around examples like these floats an aura of searching, as though career unrest represents a last frontier, a final opportunity to wrestle free from old assumptions and to reach for self-fulfillment.

PROGNOSIS

Given the current status and future prospects of these individual transactions with society, the organization, and the inner self, it sems likely that the experience of career unrest will continue to be widespread, and the condition of career unrest will continue to exert a powerful effect on our society.

NOTES

1. See his *The Division of Labor in Society*, New York, Free Press, 1933, reissued 1964. Durkheim is, of course, neither the first nor the only one to comment on the problems of compartmentalization and inner breakdown brought on by the attempt to be rational and efficient. For a succinct account of similar 19th century insights by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Ibsen, Marx, and others, see Rollo May, "Origins of the existential movement in psychology," in Rollo May, Ernest Angel, and Henri F. Ellenberger, eds. Existence, New York, Basic Books, 1958.

2. Christopher Evans (The Micro Millenium, New York, Viking, 1980) appears to believe that by 1990, hardly anyone will leave home to go to work. Alvin Toffler (The Third Wave, New York, Morrow, 1980) speaks of "electronic cottages" where one can function as both worker and consumer without ever leaving home.

3. See, for example, his *Toward a Psychology of Being*, Princeton, N.J., Van Nostrand, 1962. At its worst, the popular idea of self-fulfillment is the meretricious come-on criticized by Christopher Lasch (*The Culture of Narcissism*, New York, Norton, 1979). This version of self-fulfillment pretends to offer the rewards without the cost. At its best, the popular idea of self-fulfillment incorporates at least some of the elements of Maslow's thinking, including an emphasis on the contrast between being and non-being, and the painful conversion of the latter to the former; and a willingness to accept responsibility for one's own choices, and to search for the motives that underlie these choices.

4. It seems possible that the great popularity of frontier identification during the 1970s, continuing into the 1980s (country & western music, cowboy/girl-oriented clothing fashions, the widespread adulation of John Wayne) rises from the same underground stream in the national psyche.

5. For a glimpse of what young men (age 18-30) see when they compare their personal goals to the demands of the work world, see Gail Sheehy's "The truth about today's young men," *Esquire*, Vol. 92 (4), October, 1979, pp. 25-33.

Chapter 6

A Framework for Thinking About Career Unrest

No comprehensive theory of career unrest has been formulated. However, by starting with what we already know we can derive a working knowledge of what career unrest is like and what kinds of actions it will respond to.

PREVIEW

Since this is a long chapter, I will begin by summarizing what it says.

1. Career unrest and life unrest are related but they are not the same. Confusing the two leads to confused decision making.

2. Career unrest itself needs to be subdivided into three major types: job unrest, career content unrest, and career self unrest. Each form requires a different kind of analysis and action.

3. Career motivation is maximal when conditions in the individual, the work, and the work environment combine to allow a creative contribution. Career motivation deteriorates into career unrest when the individual feels he or she isn't making a creative contribution.

4. Career unrest can happen to anyone, including emotionally stable and highly effective persons.

5. Most people who experience career unrest tend to keep it quiet. Some may not even be consciously aware of its presence in their lives.

6. Career unrest can happen for different reasons at different ages. Normal adult development often brings important questions and turning points[1] that generate career unrest.

7. The life attitudes and coping skills one has developed by age 35 may be a critical factor in preventing severe long term career unrest.

CAREER UNREST IS NOT THE SAME AS LIFE UNREST

Career unrest and life unrest are not the same. They may occur at the same time, and they may feed each other, but they should be dealt with as separate issues.

The recent surge of interest in life unrest has unintentionally obscured the boundary lines between life unrest and career unrest, and between life satisfaction and career satisfaction.

Since life unrest is broad enough to include any sort of dissatisfaction it is easy to include career unrest as part of life unrest, and to use the terms almost interchangeably. To be sure, the two are related. But are they such overlapping quantities that they can't be separated? The practical answer to that question is: If most individuals have a hard time telling the difference between the two, treat career unrest and life unrest as a single problem; if most individuals see them as separate quantities in their own lives, treat them separately. A research project[2] which I carried out as a way of learning more about career unrest throws some light on this issue.

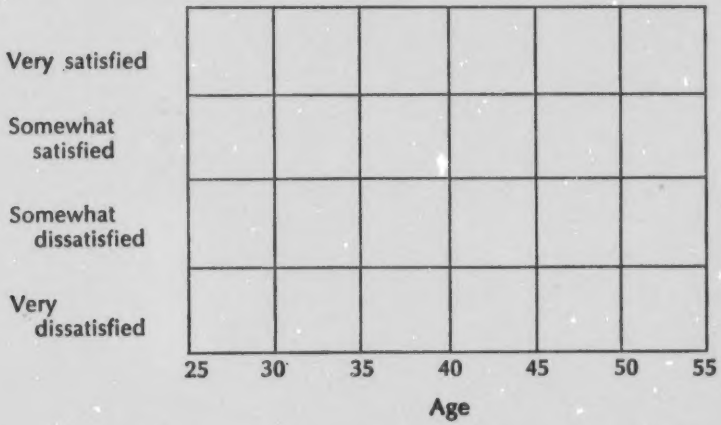
This study was designed to explore long term patterns of career and life satisfaction among executives and professionals. The population consisted of 94 males between the

ages of 35 and 55, average annual income $50,700, income range $30,000–$150,000 (1978 dollars), average age 46.1 years. Since this study will be referred to at several points throughout this book, it will be called Research Project A.

One questionnaire item in this study asked each participant to graph his career satisfaction and life satisfaction from age 25 to the present. The format for the graph looked like this:

FIGURE 1

Format For Career/Life Satisfaction Graph



An unspoken question included in the request to draw these graphs was: Do you see these two kinds of satisfaction as separate, or are they pretty much the same?

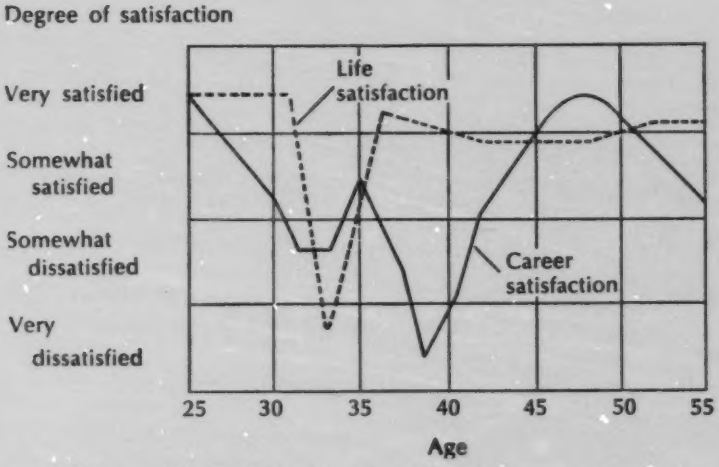
Separate Tracks

The results were unequivocal. Of the 94 men in this study, 91 saw career satisfaction and life satisfaction as two distinctly separate entities; only three saw them as the same.

Here is a graph showing a typical response to the questionnaire item:

FIGURE 2

A Typical Career/Life Satisfaction Graph



Clearly, this individual had no trouble in seeing career satisfaction and life satisfaction (or career unrest and life unrest) as separate entities. I had expected participants to see their career satisfaction and life satisfaction experience as somewhat different, but had not expected such sharp contrasts. Their marginal comments said, in effect, "Sure, we know that career satisfaction is part of general life satisfaction, but career satisfaction is so clearly related to how we feel about work and the work environment that it's easy to keep it separate from the life satisfaction that comes from how we feel about our family situations, or about the communities we live in, or other things like that."

In short, career satisfaction and life satisfaction do not follow the same track. Figure 3, below, which translates the

collective response of the entire research population into a single graph, shows that this holds true regardless of whether we think in terms of moderate satisfaction, extreme satisfaction, or extreme dissatisfaction with either life or career.

A Zigzag Pattern

The uppermost graph in Figure 3 suggests that life satisfaction and career satisfaction exchange predominance at different ages. During the age 25-35 period, life satisfaction tends to outrank career satisfaction. During the 35-45 period, the reverse is true. Then, between the ages of 45 and 50, the lines cross once more, and life satisfaction goes up while career satisfaction goes down.

The middle graph in Figure 3, which represents those very satisfied with either their lives or their careers or both, also shows the age 45-50 crisscross (life satisfaction goes above career satisfaction) but otherwise describes a somewhat different pattern. Meanwhile, the percentage of those extremely dissatisfied with their careers always exceeds the percentage extremely dissatisfied with their general life situation.

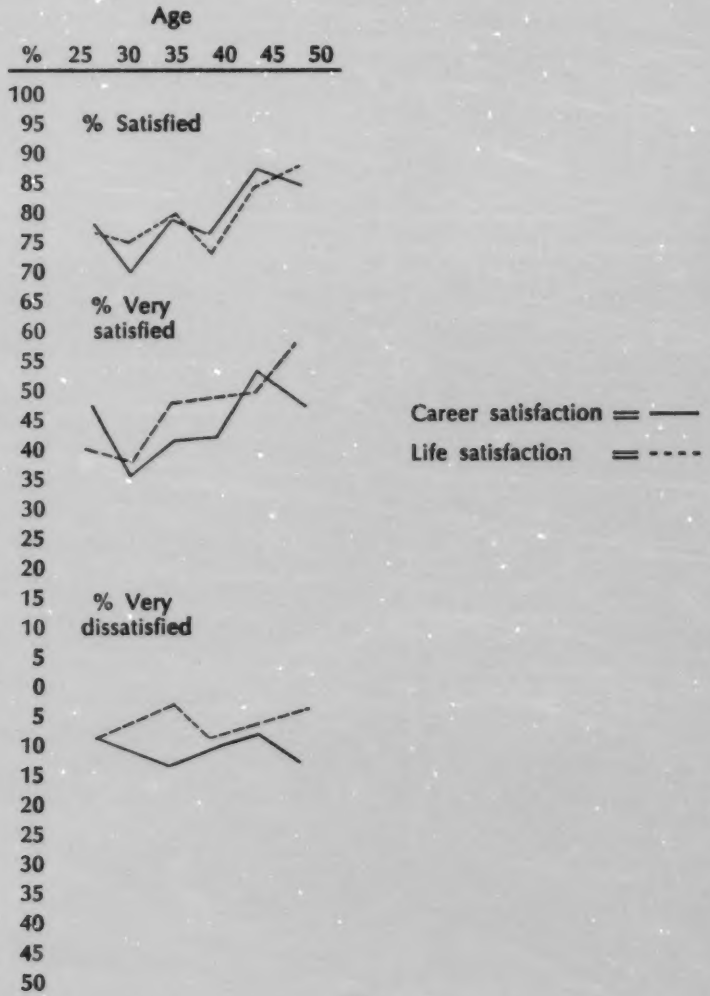
From these research results career unrest could be defined as a sense of dissatisfaction associated with one's work. A very large proportion of individuals see this dissatisfaction as separate from life unrest, a broader issue. Life unrest can be defined as a general, pervasive sense of dissatisfaction rising from any one, or any collection, of the major losses, disappointments, doubts, reconsiderations, and unfulfilled dreams of adult life. The concerns of life unrest may spill over into career dissatisfaction, but that does not mean that life unrest and career unrest should be treated as one general condition. They are related but separate entities, and confusing the two leads to confused decision making.

CAREER UNREST TAKES THREE DIFFERENT FORMS

To the Samoan, snow is a distant experience. A single and rather general definition will do quite nicely to cover all

FIGURE 3

Career/Life Satisfaction at Various Ages
(All Groups Combined)

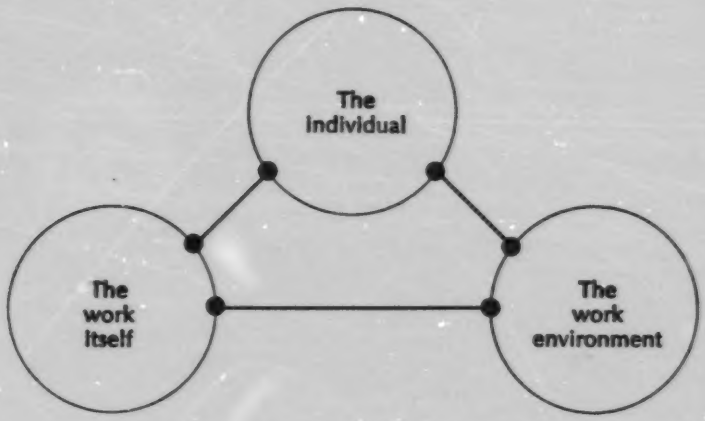


its meanings. To the Eskimo or the skier, snow comes in different varieties that require different names. Much the same principle applies to career unrest, since, for those who feel it or try to understand it, it also comes in different forms that require different names.

An analysis of many conversations with people who were expressing doubts or dissatisfactions about their careers suggests that at least three different but related kinds of unrest exist, and that a given conversation may veer back and forth from one kind to another without any conscious awareness of a change in subject. It is not surprising to find the three types of unrest jumbled together, since each of them represents a major point in a closely connected three-part system. In diagram form, the system looks like this:

FIGURE 4

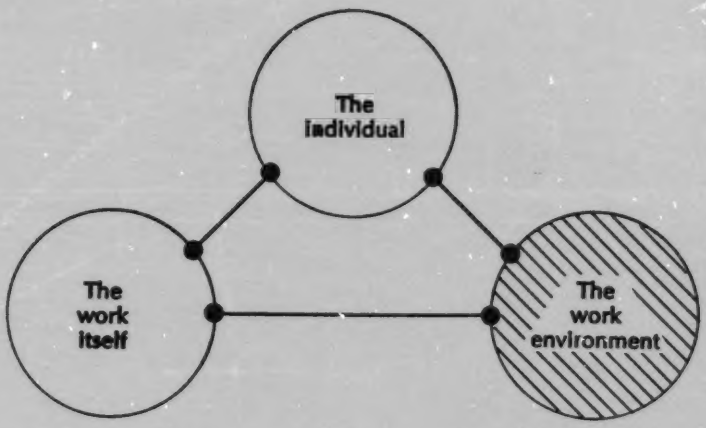
The Individual = Work = Work Environment System



Dissonance or imbalance in the system produces unrest. The kind of unrest depends on where the individual thinks the dissonance is centered.

FIGURE 5

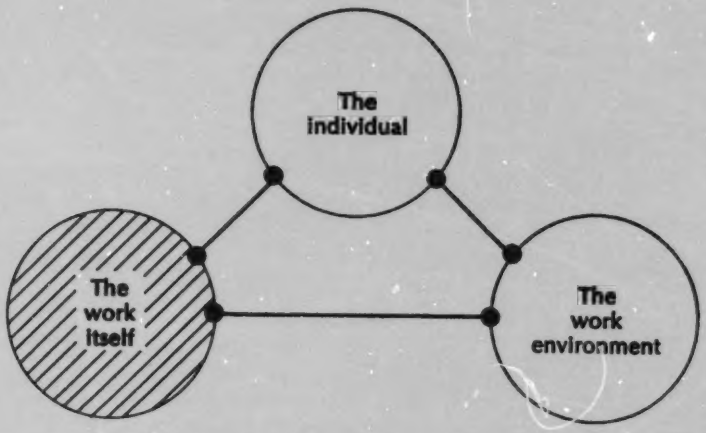
Job Unrest



When individuals believe they are not getting what they need and deserve from their work environment, they are experiencing job unrest. The major dissonance centers on where the work takes place, not on the work itself, nor on the individual.

FIGURE 6

Career Content Unrest

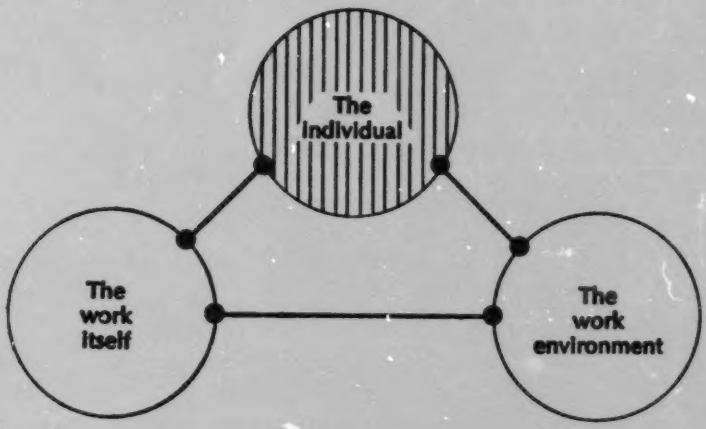


When individuals believe they are not getting what they need and deserve from the work itself, they are experiencing career content unrest. The dissatisfaction is specific to the career they have chosen, and deals with the content of the work rather than with the work environment.

When individuals feel they are not getting what they need and deserve from themselves with respect to their careers, they are experiencing career self unrest. They feel at odds with themselves as productive members of society. This kind of unrest comes from the tensions that often accompany either normal adult development or important life turning points. Career self unrest brings vague feelings of dissatisfaction with work and with the work environment, but the major dissonance centers on inner changes that interfere with career effectiveness. The chief difficulties lie in how individuals feel about themselves.

FIGURE 7

Career Self Unrest



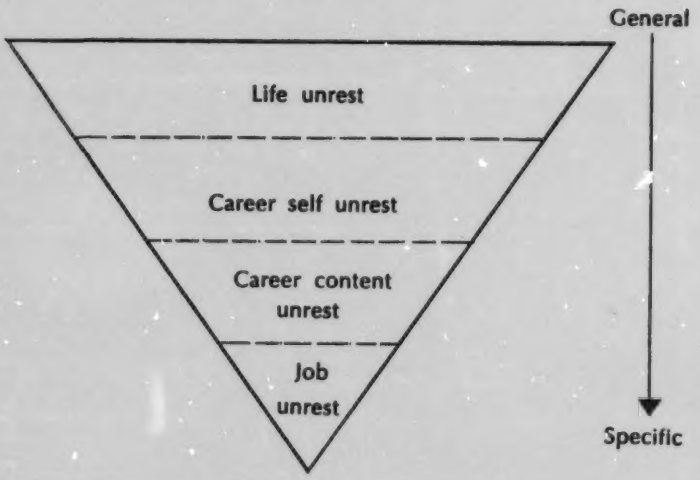
The difference between job unrest and career content unrest is relatively easy to see. One deals with job environment, the other with career content. The difference between career content unrest and career self unrest may require a little more explanation. Career content unrest is focused around work and arises directly from the nature of the work itself. Often, the sense of unrest is so strong that it forces one to think about changing careers. In contrast, career self unrest is a more diffuse experience that is hard to pin down. This kind of unrest hovers around the periphery of work, dealing with such private issues as the actual vs. the hoped-for level of achievement, or a sense of fading confidence about one's ability to reach long range goals. For the person experiencing career content unrest, the central difficulty is a clear-cut disaffection for the work itself. For the person ex-

periencing career self unrest, the central difficulty is hard to define, and the sense of unrest is likely to flit from one emphasis to another.

Life unrest and the three kinds of career unrest can be arranged in order of increasing breadth and generality, with job unrest the most specific, and life unrest the most general:

FIGURE 8

Types of Life and Career Unrest



As suggested by the dotted lines in the diagram above, there are no clearly marked separations between any two kinds of unrest. Fortunately, drawing precise boundary lines to separate these categories is less important than recognizing that they represent four different kinds of unrest, each with its own focus and implications. Considering these differences will produce better counseling, better research, and better thinking.

For the person experiencing career unrest, these differences provide some guidelines for action:

- To release the creativity bound up in job unrest, make changes in the current work environment or move to a new one.
- To release the creativity bound up in career content unrest, make changes in current career content or move to a new career.
- To release the creativity bound up in career self unrest, identify the personal changes that are going on and integrate these changes into a revised self-image.

HOW CAREER MOTIVATION DETERIORATES INTO CAREER UNREST

Though all of us know better from personal experience, we often talk about work as if it were an inanimate object acted on by human beings. Instead, work is a process—a constant flow of transactions between individual and environment. One way of thinking about this process is to picture it as a cycle. An individual makes a contribution and society responds with a reward which evokes further contributions, and so on. Of course, things are not that simple. To explain career motivation and career unrest, the cycle needs to be expanded: (1) a contribution by the individual (however motivated) (2) satisfies a need of society—if it does not satisfy a need, it is not work and is not a contribution—and thereby (3) generates productivity; some of this productivity can then be returned to the individual in the form of (4) tangible reward, which combines with the intangible rewards provided by the work environment and by the work itself to (5) meet needs and expectations of the individual; this replenishes the motivation to work and thus refuels the process. If the dissatisfactions generated by work and the work environment rise above a certain level, they interfere with motivation.

Career Motivation

From the individual's point of view, the more needs this contribution-productivity-reward cycle meets, the better it works. When economic need is the prime motivator and dissatisfaction is high, the cycle barely sputters along. Motivation, contribution, and productivity all run at minimum levels, and tangible reward may have only a remote connection to productivity. ("I hate my work, but the pay is so good I can't afford to quit.") Reduce the dissatisfaction and add the motivation generated by rewards that meet healthy self-gratification needs, and productivity improves. Best of all, allow a sense of adequately rewarded contribution—particularly creative contribution—to enter the motivational stream, and productivity soars.

Career Unrest

Block the sense of adequately rewarded contribution and the result is career unrest. It would be equally accurate to say, "Introduce career unrest and the sense of contribution is blocked."

The ability and willingness to contribute can be obstructed by the nature of the work environment, by the nature of the work itself, or by conditions within the individual.

THREE BASIC CAUSES OF UNREST

Any one of three conditions can lead to career unrest: normal change and development, excessive needs, or a weak coping system. The first two conditions can introduce turbulence that blocks the flow of creative contribution; the third, by failing to operate effectively, can allow this turbulence to get worse.

For the individual, one important source of normal change is increasing age. From the very beginning of our careers, we have to learn how to adapt to growing older. Also, the outside world continually presents us with changes that suggest

new possibilities or close off old ones. For society, normal change comes from such forces as new technology, the gradual exhaustion of natural resources, or the gradual increase in the age of our population.

Excessive needs can be found in either the individual or the environment. If left unchecked, they demand excessive contributions or excessive rewards, and this throws the contribution-productivity-reward cycle out of balance.

Both normal change and excessive needs introduce turbulence that interferes with an individual's attempt to contribute. When people in the work environment have good coping skills, they can recognize and defuse problems like these. Sometimes problems are hard to see. For example, it is common knowledge that in large organizations reports outgrow their usefulness and become phantom needs, once genuine, now outmoded. The process is so gradual that no one thinks to discontinue the report, yet no one uses it. Picture the frustration of the individual who conscientiously prepares this report. His effort to contribute to a phantom need cannot produce a balancing reward. An alert boss who spots this lopsided transaction can work set things right.

In an ideal world, the forces pushing the contribution-productivity-reward cycle toward unrest would be minimal. Technological, social, and psychological change would be gradual, and excessive needs in both the individual and the work environment would be well controlled. Also, both the individual and the environment would cooperate effectively to handle any disturbance that does occur.

Sometimes, the ideal happens. For example, the intense individual dedication and exhilarating teamwork that go into getting a new project airborne keep the process in good repair despite a work environment saturated with the unexpected and the unknown. Though the rate of change is high, excessive personal needs are held in check, coping skills are often

generously applied, and the sense of creative contribution is constantly replenished by anticipated or actual success.

More often, though, the process is handicapped by rapid change, excessive needs in the individual or the environment, weak coping skills, and distorted perceptions on both sides. All these conditions are commonplace.

CAREER UNREST CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE

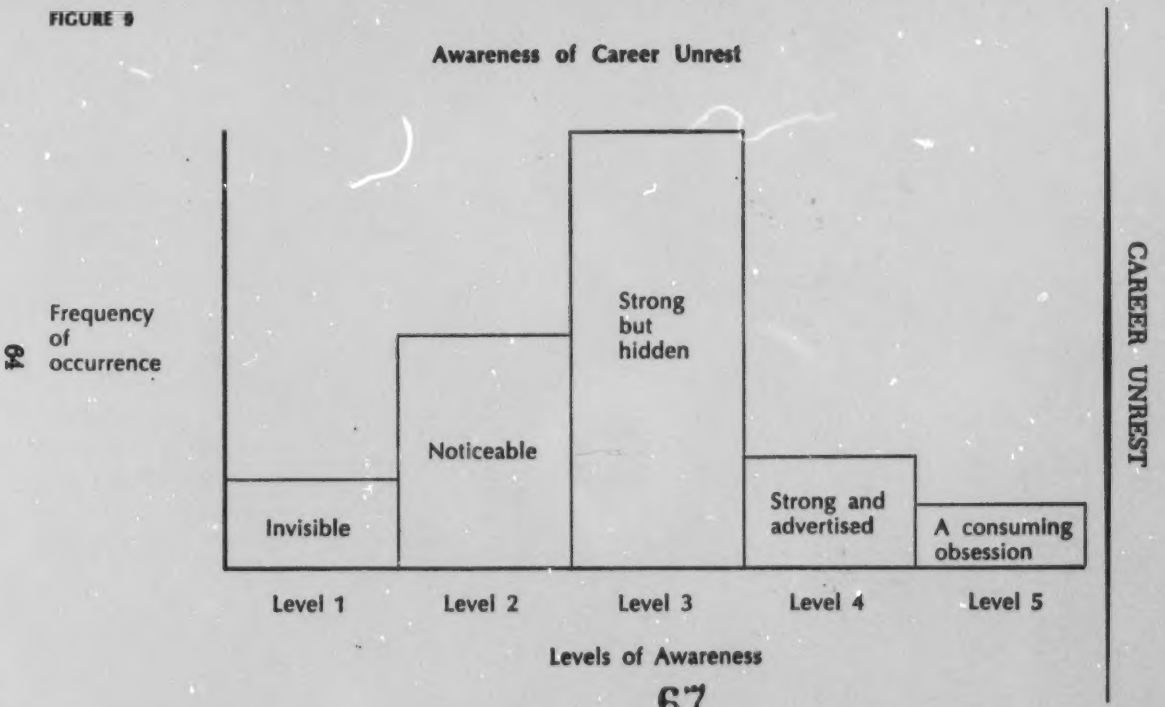
Career unrest can't be written off as a weakness that affects only misfits. True, misfits—such as the perennially discontented middle manager who has devoted a lifetime to pointing out organizational flaws—must be included among those who experience career unrest, but they are joined by many others: the higher-level executive who thoroughly enjoys the comforts and rewards of his job but finds himself becoming a little bored with it; the self-employed professional who has worked hard to establish his practice, but finds the results far less satisfying than he had hoped; the rising star who moved up fast until she hit the invisible ceiling labeled "no women promoted past here"; the homemaker who gradually discovers that she is no longer content to find her total identity in what her husband and children do.

The last two examples show how career unrest can be accelerated by social change, in this case that brought about by the women's movement of the 1970's. New waves of social change just over the horizon, such as the demand for the simultaneous blessings of affluence and leisure, and the expectation of getting more from the retirement years, are likely to become new sources of career unrest.

CAREER UNREST IS NOT ALWAYS EASY TO RECOGNIZE

Career unrest appears not only in various forms but also at different levels of awareness. As suggested by Figure 9, the feelings can emerge in dramatic form, they can operate in a strong but hidden mode (concealed from the public by the pact of silence), or they can be almost unnoticeable.

FIGURE 9


Awareness of Career Unrest
Frequency of occurrence
64
Invisible
Noticeable
Strong but hidden
Strong and advertised
A consuming obsession
Level 1
Level 2
Level 3
Level 4
Level 5
Levels of Awareness
CAREER UNREST

At level 1, career unrest is not consciously experienced (this does not mean that it doesn't exist). At levels 2 and 3, the unrest is experienced but kept private. At Levels 4 and 5, it goes public. Most individuals become aware of career unrest at Levels 2 and 3.

The graph in Figure 9 is hypothetical, but it reflects practical experience with men and women experiencing career unrest. Each level represents a group of people who are dealing with career unrest in a particular way that needs to be understood on its own terms.

CAREER UNREST HAPPENS FOR DIFFERENT REASONS AT DIFFERENT AGES

If one could sketch a history of how the general public has viewed life unrest and career unrest, it might look like the series of diagrams shown in Figure 10.

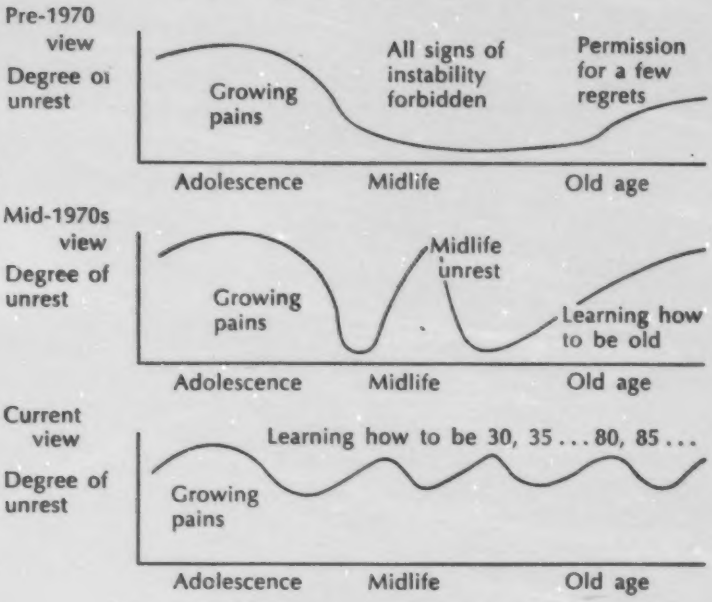
We are long past the stage of being able to sweep up all the stressful experiences and gradual changes of adult life and drop them into a basket labelled, "midlife unrest." Adult development is a continuous process that generates a continuous potential for career unrest and life unrest. The idea of a midlife turbulence that suddenly erupts at age 40 and ends by age 45 no longer fits what we know both from research and from everyday observation. Career unrest can happen at any age.

However, it is also true that career unrest happens for different reasons at different ages. Some of these reasons have to do with the internal forces of adult development.

- A 28 year old CPA wants to change jobs in order to rejoin a former boss and mentor who has gone to a new organization. A 38 year old CPA wants to change jobs in order to break a once productive but now depleted relationship with a mentor. Each is motivated by his current attitude toward the experience of

FIGURE 10

Views of Life Unrest and Career Unrest



being mentored, and those current attitudes reflect two different stages of adult development.

Other reasons for career unrest have to do with the external conditions that go along with a given age.

- Two US Army officers meet by chance while travelling crosscountry and strike up a conversation. Each discovers that the other is thinking seriously about getting out of the military and trying a new career. Both have excellent records. However, one officer is aged 26, the other 46. The younger officer is unmarried and

has just been promoted. The older has three children approaching college age, and has just been passed over for colonel. Both are experiencing career unrest, but the nature of the unrest is heavily influenced by their different professional and life situations.

IS AGE 35 A TURNING POINT?

The 94 executives and professionals who took part in Research Project A may be divided into three groups by virtue of their answers to the research questionnaire:

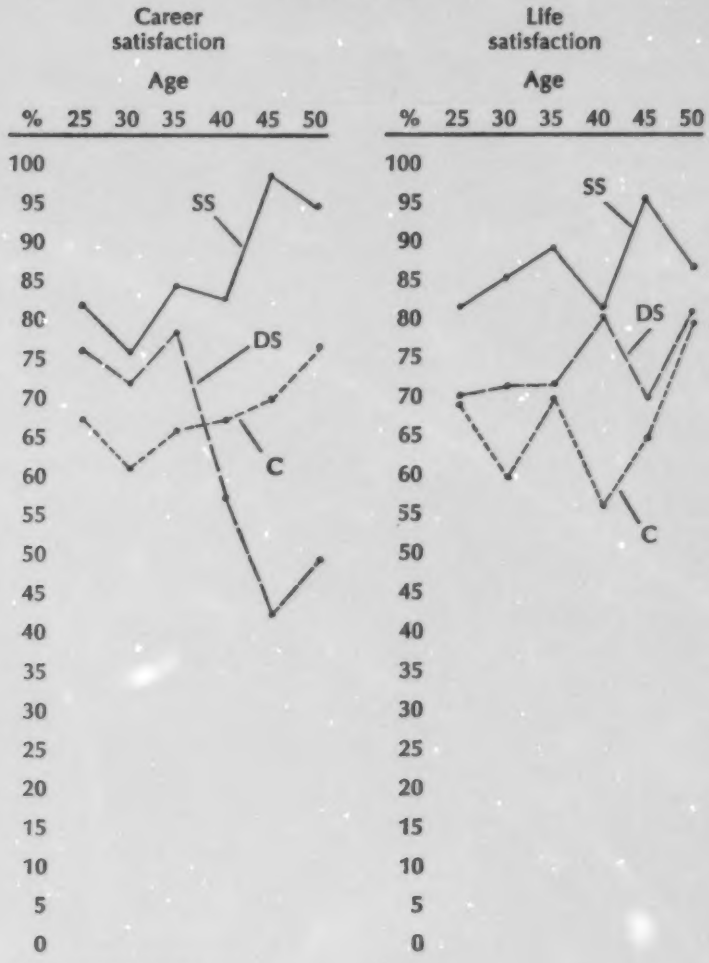
- 51 Satisfied Stayers had continued in substantially the same career throughout their adult lives and saw themselves as satisfied with this status;
- 15 Dissatisfied Stayers had continued in substantially the same career throughout their adult lives and saw themselves as dissatisfied with this status;
- 28 Changers had made a significant shift in career path.

Although the Satisfied Stayers were satisfied with their careers at the time of this survey, more than half of them said they had experienced career dissatisfaction at least once in the past. Consequently, all three groups had experienced ups and downs in career satisfaction since age 25. Comparing satisfaction levels by age for each group brings out some interesting contrasts. In particular, the career satisfaction curves of the Satisfied Stayers and Dissatisfied Stayers take dramatically different directions from age 35 onward (see Figure 11). The career satisfaction of the Satisfied Stayers declines between ages 35 and 40, then rises sharply until age 45. That of the Dissatisfied Stayers drops between the ages of 35 and 40, then continues plunging until age 45.

Before age 35, career satisfaction in the two groups follows a somewhat similar path; after age 35, they take dramatically different routes. This finding is consonant with Daniel Levinson's view of the age 35-40 period as characterized by the

FIGURE 11

Career/Life Satisfaction at Various Ages
(Three Groups)



SS = Satisfied Stayers
DS = Dissatisfied Stayers
C = Changers

anxiety of meeting a self-imposed achievement schedule ("If I don't make area manager by age 40, I'll never get where I want to go"). Apparently, the Satisfied Stayers made it, the Dissatisfied Stayers didn't.

But what enabled the Satisfied Stayers (and the Changers) to get through this period so effectively, while the Dissatisfied Stayers were sliding into a morass of discontent? My research was not designed to answer this question. However, marginal comments by research participants suggest that the big difference lies in coping skills and attitudes. Satisfied Stayers are better equipped emotionally to handle donwswings in their careers. Sometimes that means knowing when and how to break out of the situation, sometimes it means knowing when and how to stay put and ride out the storm. Meanwhile, Dissatisfied Stayers seem more inclined to let events close in around them.

Also, Satisfied Stayers and Changers are likely to hold themselves responsible for their own career satisfaction, while Dissatisfied Stayers seem to depend on outside forces to supply the conditions for career satisfaction. One Satisfied Stayer said, "I firmly believe that, given enough patience and ingenuity on my part, most of the vicissitudes of career satisfaction are under my control"; a Dissatisfied Stayer said, "Looking back on my career, I'm a little surprised to discover that the time I was happiest in my work was when we lived in the South."

If further research substantiates these contrasts, we may be able to draw on this knowledge to identify and teach better ways of coping with career unrest.

NOTE

1. *Turning Points* — For a thoughtful exposition of this idea, See Stanley Keleman's *Living Your Dying*, New York, Random House, 1974, pp. 21-26.

2. Oliver, Robert [same ref. as for "Research Project A"].

Chapter 7

Job Unrest

The discontent in job unrest centers around work conditions rather than around the work itself. Change the work conditions and the job unrest disappears.

This rough hewn description emphasizes where the trouble lies, but it does not tell the whole story. Job unrest centers on the work environment but is not caused by the work environment. Putting the full blame on the work environment does not explain why the same environment can be unpleasant for one person but quite satisfactory for another. A more complete view of job unrest needs to take into account the constant give and take between the needs and expectations of the individual and the requirements of the work environment. It is this interaction, not the work environment itself, that produces satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and it is this interaction that holds the key to understanding job unrest.

Rather than assuming that the sources of job unrest must lie solely in the work environment or solely in the individual, we will concentrate on the interaction between the two. Following are some illustrations of how the individual-job environment relationship can get pushed out of balance.

JOB UNREST RESULTING FROM NORMAL CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

The Organization As Parent

Nothing can change the lopsided division of power between the organization and the individual. Even in that

occasional best of worlds where the individual and the organization engage one another in a climate of mutual good will, both sides know who holds the high cards. Decades of training (human relations in the 1950's, organizational grid in the 1960's, organization development tactics in the 1970's) may well have improved the potential for good individual-environment interactions, but they have not and cannot change the reality: the organization is Parent, the employee is Child. Permanent disparity of power between two contracting parties is a continual breeding ground for dissatisfaction.

In his early writings, Chris Argyris [1] pointed to the incongruity between the needs of the organization and those of the individual. The more formal the organization, and the lower the individual in the organization structure, the greater the demands for and rewards of dependency, submissiveness, few and shallow abilities and a short time perception (you worry about today's job, I'll worry about tomorrow's). The organization needs, prefers, and rewards childlike behavior.

One need not paint the organization as villain to accept the essential truth in this point of view. Pressure towards dependence and submissiveness is inherent in the system and it makes itself felt at all levels in all organizations. Similar pressures are a reality in the lives of supposedly independent professionals or faculty members.

Fortunately, individuals differ in the amount of dependency they can tolerate or thrive on. Perhaps most executives and professionals gravitate toward positions that exact a degree of obedience and dependence they feel comfortable with. Matched to the right organization, they can tolerate its parental functions and avoid job unrest—as long as conditions remain stable.

And there is the difficulty. During the 1980's, the gap between the degree of control the organization wants to impose and that which the individual is willing to accept is

likely to widen. Economic conditions are nudging the organization toward tighter controls, and even a slight change toward greater control in the work environment, however well justified by the circumstances, can produce a surge of job unrest. At the same time, the cultural importance of self-fulfillment is leading the individual toward a desire for looser control. Organization and individual are pulling in opposite directions. One wants more control, the other wants less, and the result is a work environment with a built-in potential for job unrest.

Lack Of Stable Expectations

The contribution-productivity-reward cycle described in Chapter 6 is an exchange agreement between the individual and the environment. The individual contributes his or her work and, in return, receives a reward. As long as the contribution meets a genuine need and the reward matches the individual's expectations, both sides are satisfied.

Two investigators[2] of work satisfaction, Lofquist and Dawis, believe that such a balancing concept cannot work until minimum levels of need satisfaction are clear on both sides. According to them, these minimum levels can be "identified and predicted by observing a group with substantial tenure in a stable environment." If they are right, they have put a finger on how job unrest can be generated by the normal ebb and flow of change in a growing, active organization. Work groups with substantial tenure in a stable environment are more the exception than the rule. The continuing reorganization, transfers, and relocation that many of us experience in our work simply do not allow minimum levels of satisfaction to take shape. The absence of clear criteria generates anxiety and job unrest.

JOB UNREST RESULTING FROM EXCESSIVE NEEDS

Sometimes job unrest can be the direct result of unhealthy conditions in the individual or the work environment. Here is a real-life example.

A tall, slender, fashionably dressed man walks into the lobby of an office building and steps into the elevator. He is 50 years old, and his name is Raymond. Those standing nearby assume he is probably an executive on his way to some kind of business appointment, and, in a way, they are right. For 22 consecutive years, Raymond worked as a creative director (sales promotion, public relations, advertising) for the regional sales office of a large and well known corporation. A few months ago, he abruptly resigned, saying, "I can't take it any longer." He has not worked since.

His business appointment is with a psychiatrist who specializes in medical-legal problems. Raymond maintains that the cumulative stresses of 22 years on the job have established permanent psychic scars that now undermine his ability to hold even the most undemanding position. As he sits down with the psychiatrist and unfolds his story, it becomes evident that there was indeed a climate of work-related stress: a high rate of turnover in the upper executive ranks; frequently conflicting demands from the two powerful (and highly competitive) departments which Raymond's staff position served; occasional blunt demands that he violate important company policies and keep this hidden; blistering censure in front of his own subordinates; ridicule from both peers and superiors over the fact that he is unmarried, with a suggestion of homosexuality as the reason (the real reason lies in a socially withdrawn personality style that severely limits his ability to establish close relationships with persons of either sex).

At the same time, it becomes evident that Raymond is by no means blameless. He has an unconscious pattern of finding ways to alienate those around him. He, too, censures

his subordinates in public and deliberately plays favorites among them. The overall picture reflects poorly on both the individual and the organization he served. Turbulence is everywhere, and sarcasm and anger are standard modes of communication.

This is a case of job unrest caused primarily by unchecked excessive needs in both the individual and the environment. Raymond lacked the coping skill to extricate himself from the situation and find another job; his organization refused to look at both the unrest itself and the conditions that caused it.

Sickness of this sort[3] is much more widespread than we would like to think. In some organizations, it is a way of life.

JOB UNREST RESULTING FROM FAILURES IN THE COPING SYSTEM

Job Ambiguity vs. Personal Belief System

Some persons handle an ambiguous job situation better than others. A research study[4] of 94 senior scientists and engineers in R&D and engineering organizations suggest that the difference lies in a person's locus of control—his or her belief system about how the world operates. The person who believes that "most of what happens in my life is the result of my own actions and initiatives" is oriented toward internal control. The person who believes that "most of what happens in my life is the result of powerful forces outside myself" is oriented toward external control.

In this study, the subjects divided themselves into Internals and Externals according to their answers to a brief questionnaire. Each subject also reported on how ambiguous he considered his job requirements to be. Those who felt the most ambiguity ("I'm not sure what the organization expects of me") tended to be Externals; those who felt the least job ambiguity tended to be Internals. Also, those who

felt the greatest job ambiguity reported the least job satisfaction.

Evidently, a person's attitude toward life affects his or her ability to put structure into an ambiguous job situation. How does this attitude translate into the ability to handle a job setting with no clear ground rules?

Internals don't demand a lot of structure. Put them into an environment where the change rate is high and the visibility factor is low and they will find a way to tolerate this ambiguity or, on their own, they will develop some structure to reduce it. Either response helps those around them to function better. Internals can make a creative contribution by tolerating or restructuring an ambiguous situation. Externals seem less able to do this, and feel stressed when their work requires it.

Consequently, mis-assigning Externals into very ambiguous situations can produce job unrest. For example, transferring a talented engineer who loves clarity and who thrives on solving technical problems into a temporary slot that has no laws or ground rules can be a shattering experience for both the individual and the organization.

Also, it is well to remember that Internal-External attitudes and other personal belief systems do not grow in a vacuum. The work environment exerts a powerful influence on the people in it. Organizations differ to a remarkable degree on how much and what kind of "checking with the boss" is required, and whatever level of control they choose to exert is reinforced by a powerful reward and punishment economy. The tighter the control, the more the individual is pushed toward an External belief system, and the more that individual will ignore those pious pleas for independent thinking and action that appear in the company appraisal form. It is the organization's reward and punishment economy that teaches the individual what to believe about how the world operates.

Job Demands vs. Personal Life

Tom, Dick, and Harry have something in common. All three are experiencing job unrest, and the dissatisfaction for all three centers around a common problem: conflict between work demands and personal life. However, they have chosen different ways of coping with this unrest.

Tom is carefully trying to modify his work environment so that its demands are more tolerable and its needs are a better match for the contribution he wants to make. This includes some negotiation with his boss about travel requirements and about one particular responsibility which he believes could be assigned to someone else.

Dick is taking a different tack. Instead of trying to reshape his environment, he is rethinking his assumptions and self-expectations. May be he *has* been spending more time than necessary on non-work activities; maybe he *was* being unrealistic to expect a promotion so soon.

Meanwhile, Harry is giving no quarter to either the expectations of his work environment or the expectations he places on himself. He must continue to show up an hour early for work because that's what he believes his boss expects; at the same time, he must continue the four nights a week of church and community activities because that is what he believes he should be doing. He wishes he didn't have to spend so much time and energy on his job, and he wishes he didn't have those endless evening committee meetings, but his way of responding to conflicting demands has always been, "Maybe if I work a little harder I can still do everything."

Balancing work life and personal life is a familiar dilemma and a familiar source of guilt for most of us. In the example given, Tom concentrates on changing the environment, Dick on changing his expectations of himself and of his environment, and Harry on redoubling his efforts in the hope that this will solve the problem.

Douglas Hall, an investigator of coping styles,[5] has labelled these three coping responses, respectively, Type I, Type II, and Type III coping.[6] The person who habitually resorts to Type III coping is poorly equipped to handle job unrest rising from the almost inevitable conflict between work life and personal life. It is the Harrys of this world who have nervous breakdowns and wonder why.

The Perceived Imposed Role[7]

"The perceived imposed role" may sound like a phrase plucked from a pedantic sociology text, but beneath the jargon lies an important insight into how we deal with our work environments. Perceived imposed roles are the behavior we see as required and allowed in our unique position. Without exception, all of us develop our own perceived imposed roles and operate according to their dictates. If asked, each of us could probably identify some elements of his or her unique role, but much of it lies beyond our conscious awareness. Nevertheless, both the conscious and unconscious dimensions of this perceived imposed role exercise control over our job behavior and job satisfaction.

- A Protestant minister with a well earned reputation as an excellent leader and administrator accepts a call to a church located in a university town. A year later, his congregation still looks in vain for the changes they expected under this leadership. Instead, he has concentrated most of his effort on sermon preparation. "After all," he thinks, "there are more than a dozen eminent theologians in my congregation and my preaching should come up to their expectations. The leadership can come later." He has placed himself in a perceived imposed role that is out of sync with both his strengths and the expectations of his work environment.

In addition to the perceived imposed role, each of us carries within herself or himself an ideal role: "This is the

way I want my work role to be right now." As with the perceived imposed role, some of this ideal role is conscious, but much of it is unconscious. The ideal role deals solely with the present and has nothing to to with future aspirations and career goals. Therefore, it serves as an inexorable standard against which our perceived imposed role is constantly measured. If the gap between the two is too great, job unrest (and perhaps also specific career unrest) becomes a problem.

The Two Factor Theory Misapplied

No discussion of job unrest would be complete without some mention of Frederick Herzberg's two-factor theory [8] of work satisfaction. Briefly, Herzberg asked a sample of 200 engineers and accountants to give examples of both satisfactory and unsatisfactory job experiences. His analysis of their examples led him to believe that one set of factors causes work satisfaction and another set causes dissatisfaction. The satisfiers are predominantly related to intrinsic work conditions (achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, opportunity for growth and advancement). The dissatisfiers are predominantly related to extrinsic work conditions (environmental factors, working conditions, pay).

Herzberg concluded that intrinsic factors can produce satisfaction but not dissatisfaction; extrinsic factors can produce dissatisfaction but not satisfaction.

Prior to this time, theorists had apparently assumed that any dimension of the job could produce either satisfaction or dissatisfaction depending on how much or little of that dimension was present in a particular job. Over the past two decades, this view has excited much interest. However, its value and applicability have been clouded by the conflicting bodies of research and opinion that have grown up around it. One investigator, for example, has suggested that it would be only natural for an individual to assign causes for satisfaction

to his own achievements (included in intrinsic factors), and to lay the blame for dissatisfaction on some aspect of the job environment (included in extrinsic factors). Thus, Herzberg's method of asking the individual for specific examples of satisfaction and dissatisfaction on work experience could well have biased the results.

Perhaps some of the controversy may be due to a misapplication of Herzberg's theory, or, more accurately, an unselective application of the theory. One research study [9] has shown that those with high self-esteem respond to their work environment in a different way from those with low self-esteem. Individuals with high self-esteem place high importance on intrinsic work values, and lower importance on extrinsic work values; those with low self-esteem reverse this priority, placing low importance on intrinsic work values, and higher importance on extrinsic work values.

If this relationship stands up under further research, it could mean that the high self-esteem individual is unmoved by programs that lavish excessive care on extrinsic work factors. Costly efforts to prevent or alleviate job unrest by improving extrinsic factors may win popularity from those with low self-esteem, but completely miss the target for those with high self-esteem.

The above examples and ideas are not intended to be an exhaustive list. They illustrate the ways in which job unrest can be generated by any of its three main sources: normal change and development, excessive needs, and failures in the coping system. In particular, they show how not paying attention to the give and take between the individual and the job environment can extinguish the creative spark a given individual has to offer. It is the give and take that matters, not the job environment itself.

NOTES

1. See his *Personality and Organization*, New York, Harper, 1957.

2. Lloyd H. Lofquist and René V. Dawis, *Adjustment to Work*, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969.

3. See, for example, the extensive article entitled "Crazy boss presents problems," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 25, 1980.

4. D. W. Organ and C. N. Greene, "Role ambiguity, locus of control, and work satisfaction," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 1974, 59, 101-102.

5. *coping styles* – See Douglas T. Hall, "A model of coping with role conflict: the role behavior of college educated women," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1972, 17, 471-486.

6. *coping* Another view of coping can be found in George E. Valliant's interesting long-term study of gifted university graduates (*Adaptation To Life*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1977). Valliant, drawing heavily on psychoanalytic theory, sees such devices as projection, repression, and sublimation as coping responses to sudden life crises or unresolved conflicts. Defense mechanisms can allow the space necessary to master changes in self-image after traumatic life events, and can even be used (at least with the gifted individuals Valliant studied) to bring about spontaneous recovery from symptoms of mental illness. I consider this emphasis on psychological defenses as coping mechanisms rather optimistic– projection and repression cannot be carried very far without generating serious internal discrepancies between belief and reality.

7. This idea is developed by A.L. Brophy in his "Self, role, and satisfaction," *Genetic Psychological Monographs*, 1959, 54, 263-308. The perceived imposed role is an outgrowth of Brophy's effort to explain work satisfaction simultaneously in two dimensions: the individual as a separate being with a private internal experience (self concept theory), and the shaping force of the work environment around that individual (role theory). My reading of Brophy's monograph leads me to believe he was trying to explain work motivation, not work satisfaction.

8. *two-factor theory* See F. Herzberg, B. Mausner, and B. Snyderman, *The Motivation To Work*, New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1959.

9. *research study* See A. K. Korman, "Self-esteem as a moderator in vocational choice: replication and extension," *Journal Of Applied Psychology*, 1969, 53, 188-192. See also C.G. Elton, "Interaction of environment and personality: a test of Holland's theory," *Journal Of Vocational Behavior*, 1971, a, 75-92.

Chapter 8

Career Content Unrest

Career content unrest occupies a middle ground between the concentrated dissatisfaction of job unrest and the often vague dissatisfaction of career self unrest. The dissatisfaction of career content unrest centers directly on the work itself, and generates serious doubts about long-term satisfaction. "I don't like the kind of work I'm doing, and as I look ahead to the future I don't see it getting any better. Changing jobs won't help, because I'd still be doing the same kind of work."

Simple logic, which, in this case, coincides with conventional wisdom, suggests two basic possible causes for career content unrest. One could be labeled "poor initial career choice." In early adulthood, the individual selects (or drifts into) a career that is a poor match with his or her abilities, interests, and values. Various pressures, personal and environmental, conscious and latent, obscure this square-peg reality for a number of years. Finally, it emerges into full view. Following this line of thought, career content unrest is the delayed recognition of a long-term misalliance between the person and his or her work.

The other basic cause of career content unrest might be called "a changed perspective." The new perspective can rise from something as tangible as a heart attack, or from something as intangible as a shift in values within either the individual or the environment around the individual. Whatever the precipitating factor, some change occurs to make an

effective initial choice of career deteriorate into a poor fit. Work that once brought satisfaction and psychological nourishment now becomes a source of dissatisfaction and unrest.

INITIAL CAREER CHOICE AS A CAUSE OF UNREST

While it is easy to accept the idea that a poor initial career choice could lead to career unrest, it may be more difficult to see how poor initial career choice could exist, given the widespread career counseling that prevails in our society. On the surface, we seem exceptionally well equipped to guide an individual to the "right" career choice. Occupational psychology has been an active area of research and practice in this country for some seven decades; few high schools and colleges are without some program of vocational guidance; pamphlets and books explaining various occupations are common fare in any library.

But career counseling cannot rise above the level of the career choice theory on which it is based, and professionals in this field express more diffidence than confidence about the status of career choice theories. One authority states, "Theories about career development are not theories in the traditional sense; they . . . are theory fragments which attempt to integrate and systematize a portion of human behavior." [1]

On a more pragmatic level, another observer cuts to the heart of the problem when he says, "Choice of an occupation is not primarily logical or rational, but is a somewhat blind, impulsive, emotional and automatic process and not always subject to practical and reasonable consideration." [2] All theories of career choice and development must deal in some way with this common sense truth. They do this by steering a middle course between a narrowly stated point of view that offers clarity but ignores many factors, and a broad, comprehensive point of view that takes many factors into account but can be applied only in a general way. No career choice

theory (and, therefore, no career counseling approach) deals effectively with all, or even most, of this 'blind, impulsive process'.

Career Choice Theories

What is the nature of these theories? Essentially there are three viewpoints. One sees career choice as controlled largely by factors within the person, another sees it as controlled largely by factors in the environment, and the third occupies a position roughly halfway between the "intrapersonal factors" and the "environmental factors" viewpoints.

The most extreme position within the "intrapersonal factors" viewpoint would be that held by theorists who see the career choice dominated by unconscious forces. In effect, they say, "you believe you are making a choice based on rational considerations, but you are actually gratifying needs arising from physiological and psychological experiences of your infancy and childhood. Without being aware of it, you have been inexorably drawn to an occupation that allows you to express the unconscious residues of these childhood experiences." Using the Freudian language in which this view is often expressed, mining engineers are oral aggresive, architects are genital, accountants are anal retentive, and so on. A somewhat more moderate view that still places heavy emphasis on non-conscious factors is that of Anne Roe,[3] whose studies of exceptionally successful men have led her to believe that career choice is heavily influenced by early parent-child interactions. For example, the many verbal and non-verbal messages parents send to their children about getting along with people can guide their children either toward or away from careers that emphasize interpersonal skills.

At the opposite end of the spectrum come those theories which focus on coping with environmental realities. The fact that these theories are often called "accident of birth"[4] theories gives an idea of their orientation. The individual is not really

free to choose. Environmental realities and the accident of birth determine to a large extent what possibilities are open.

Currently, the two most influential theories are those of Donald Super [5] and John Holland [6]; both take a position about midway between the "intrapersonal factors dominate career choice" vs. "environmental factors dominate career choice" extremes described above.

Super organizes his approach around the idea that a person chooses that occupation which allows him to express his self-concept to the maximum, given the limits afforded by his environment. The choice is not one single decision, but a series of interrelated, sequential decisions that occur at various ages from childhood through early adulthood.

Holland sees career choice as a process of matching one's personality type to an occupation that best fits that personality. He has devised a system, based on a great deal of research, for classifying individuals according to personality type, and for identifying those occupations most likely to be compatible with that personality type.

All these theories have their weakness, but each of them emphasizes an important aspect of career choice and thereby sheds some light on specific career unrest.

Although the theories that stress unconscious forces from childhood experience are far too limited to be of much value in helping a person choose a career, they do deal with a frequently ignored truth. Many of our important actions and choices are formed by powerful motives that lie below the level of conscious awareness. Some people strongly resist ideas of this sort. "Wait a minute," they say, "that may apply to someone else, but not to me. I'm intelligent, responsible, emotionally stable, and accustomed to taking the initiative." All probably true, but irrelevant. One can possess handsome amounts of all the above qualities and still find that he or she is unconsciously using response patterns learned in child-

hood. Some of these patterns (for example, "always play it safe") may well have dictated one's career path and may be hindering his or her career effectiveness and satisfaction.

The "accident of birth" theories that emphasize the influence of environmental factors on career choice ignore the effect of inner drives and self-determination in choosing a career, but they do call attention to the stark realities of circumstance. In our society, one is ostensibly free to choose a vocation but is actually constrained by a network of complex external forces. Vocational choice is rarely a completely free choice.

Super's theory is somewhat vague when it comes to practical application. How does one go about choosing a career that will "implement the self-concept"? However, it does stress the need to see work as an extension of oneself and as a means of building one's self-esteem. Recent research suggests that Holland's system for choosing the occupation most likely to fit one's personality style is much less neat and effective than it sounds, but it underlines the value of entering an occupation where colleagues are likely to have similar interests and compatible ways of looking at a problem.

In sum, these theories, and the counseling based on them, offer more in the way of useful insights than surehanded guidance to the "right" career. They provide no guarantees against poor initial career choice.

Four Hypotheses

How can a young adult or a midcareer changer best go about choosing a career? Is there an approach that raises the probability of lasting career satisfaction?

Research Project A[7] provides some answers to these questions. As mentioned in Chapter 6, this project was a study of career satisfaction and dissatisfaction among executive and professional males. These men, according to their answers to several items in the research questionnaire, were divided into

three groups: Satisfied Stayers, Dissatisfied Stayers, and Changers. (These groups are defined in Chapter 6.)

As part of the research project, I tested four hypotheses about possible relationships between initial career choice and career unrest. The reasoning behind these hypotheses is as follows: If there is a best way of choosing a career, and if that best way can be clearly identified, individuals could rely on that approach to improve their chances of choosing the right career for themselves, and thus avoid unnecessary career unrest; on the other hand, if there is no demonstrable relation between initial career choice and later career satisfaction, individuals can choose an initial career (or a second career) in any way they like—random selection is no more likely to produce career unrest than is the most painstaking use of career counseling.

The results of this research are unequivocal. One "best" approach to choosing a career stands out clearly. The results were also unexpected, since the hypotheses did not turn out as I had thought they would.

The first two hypotheses were based on the idea, extensively developed by John Holland, that choosing a career which fits one's personality pattern improves the likelihood of lasting career satisfaction.

Using a great deal of research data, Holland has defined personality in terms of measurable interest patterns, and has developed a system that organizes interest patterns into six clusters.[8] His system also organizes occupations into six groups that parallel these interest clusters.

Personality/Interest Pattern	*Occupational Example*
Realistic	Forester
Investigative	Physicist
Artistic	Actor
Social	Minister
Enterprising	Advertising Executive
Conventional	CPA

Naturally, very few of us would be a pure "Realistic," "Artistic," etc. Each of us is a mixture of the six types, but one of the six is likely to be dominant, with perhaps one or two other types almost as important. An individual's unique mix of these six types is measured by the Strong Campbell Interest Inventory (SCII), a well respected test that has existed in various forms for nearly 40 years.

Since occupations can be grouped into six parallel clusters, it is relatively easy to check the match between a person's initial career choice and his or her personality pattern.

Translating this idea into research hypotheses meant predicting that the men in the research population who, as young adults, chose careers that matched their interest patterns were more likely to become Satisfied Stayers than those who chose careers that didn't match their interest patterns. For example, an "Enterprising" person who chose to become an advertising executive would be more likely to become a Satisfied Stayer than an "Enterprising" person who chose to become a physicist.

Although this seemed to be a logical assumption, it proved to be untrue.[9] Dissatisfied Stayers and Changers (who at one time had been Dissatisfied Stayers) were just as likely as Satisfied Stayers to have chosen initial careers that were an approximate fit to their interest patterns. Also, some Satisfied Stayers were in careers that clearly did not fit their interest patterns as measured by the SCII, yet they saw themselves as reasonably satisfied. Perhaps even more puzzling, some of the Changers had moved to new careers more dissonant with their personality patterns than their first careers, and said they were happy in these new careers. In short, the hypotheses seemed logical but the facts of this research did not support them.

These first two hypotheses were organized around the "what" of career choice, that is, they were focused on what choices a person could make. In contrast, the third and

fourth hypotheses were organized around the "how" of career choice, that is, they were focused on how the person went about making the choice.

Drawing on the ideas of Erik Erikson [10] and others [11] who have speculated about how an individual achieves a sense of identity and self-worth, I based the third hypothesis on the idea that the initial choice of career represents an important way of establishing one's identity. If one puts a great deal of energy and thought into the initial career decision, he is making the career part of his own identity. This should establish a firm commitment to the choice and improve the probability of lasting career satisfaction.

Questionnaire responses did not bear this out. Those who put much energy and thought into the initial career choice were just as likely to become Dissatisfied Stayers or Changers as Satisfied Stayers. Therefore, the hypothesis was unsupported.

The fourth hypothesis was based on the idea that lasting career satisfaction depends on the person's own private view of what was going on at the time he made the choice. Was the choice made primarily in response to the pull of inner desires? Or was it made primarily in response to the push of environmental forces (either persons or events)? In other words, was the choice Self Determined or Environmentally Determined?

Each executive or professional who took part in this research identified his initial career choice as Self Determined or Environmentally Determined by answering the following:

Individuals choose their careers in a variety of ways. For the purpose of this question, career is defined as the first general occupational field (e.g., business, education, law) to which you committed yourself for at least seven years. Which of the following statements best describes the way you chose your original career? (Read all six, then choose one.)

1. I considered a number of possibilities seriously, then finally settled on one. Choosing a career was a difficult decision point in my life.

2. At a rather early age, I decided what I wanted to do and never considered anything else seriously. Making a career choice was easy.

3. I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do. I just started by taking a job that was available, and things developed from there in a way that kept me well satisfied and committed to that field for some time.

4. The decision was really more someone else's than mine. It was just expected that I would enter a certain career, and I did.

5. I was forced to take whatever job I could find, and I just stayed in that field.

6. I've never felt committed to my work, though I've been reasonably good at it. I never had any sense of choosing a career.

Those who selected one of the first three choices were classified as Self Determined; those who selected one of the latter three were classified as Environmentally Determined.

The hypothesis predicated that those who entered their careers in a Self Determined way were more likely to become Satisfied Stayers than those who entered in an Environmentally Determined way. This prediction was emphatically supported. The probability that the research results could have occurred by chance is less than three in 1000.

Replaying The Hand

Why did the first three hypotheses fail to predict who would become Satisfied Stayers? Probably because they are too specific and limited to explain a very complex relationship.

Consider the first two hypotheses, which were based on the "choose an occupation that fits your personality style"

approach. Intuitively, it is not difficult to accept the proposition that one who chooses an occupation that closely matches his personality pattern increases his chances for career satisfaction. Yet the results of my investigation did not bear this out. Apparently, the distance between initial career choice and career unrest is too great, and too crowded with intervening variables, to permit using a precisely stated and easily measurable theory of occupational choice to predict career satisfaction.

Probably the most important of these intervening variables is the individual himself. His ability to shape his circumstances—whatever they are—to his own ends has a material effect on his career satisfaction. The achievement records of the men in this research population suggest that all of them, even the Dissatisfied Stayers, have developed coping skills which could be used to overcome dissonance between personality style and occupation. A person with an Enterprising personality style might exist quite satisfactorily in a Conventional occupation if he carries on a successful mail order business in his spare time. The spare time activity takes care of his Enterprising needs.

In any event, carefully choosing an occupation that offers a close fit with one's personality style seems to offer no protection against career unrest later on in life.

As for the third hypothesis, based on the idea of career choice as a means of achieving one's identity, research results show that the men in this study who expended great energy and involvement in choosing their initial careers did nothing to increase their chances of career satisfaction. Looking at the results from this apparently plausible hypothesis, one wonders if the effort of the choice itself might have produced some unexpected side effects within the private worlds of the serious and responsible men included in this study. One can imagine them as young adults, intent on making their mark in the world, and willing to undergo the stern, somewhat

Calvinistic demands of crisis and commitment as the price for membership in the "right" career. Could the very struggle that sanctified the choice have, in some cases, trampled down a badly needed sense of joy and freedom that might have come from making the choice more gradually and less portentously?

Such speculation aside, it seems clear that the chief difference between the third hypothesis, which could not predict career satisfaction, and the fourth hypothesis, which could, lies in the flexibility it affords to the career chooser. For one person, career choice may be a crisis experience; for another, it may be a clearcut but effortless decision; for still another, a series of small choices that gradually lead in a certain direction. Any of several ways of approaching career choice seems to work. The key ingredient is the sense that one makes the choice himself, rather than having it forced on him by other persons or by his environment.

To recapitulate, choosing a career in a way that improves one's chances for lasting career satisfaction seems to lie more in how the career is chosen than in what career is chosen; and the significant aspect of how the career is chosen seems to lie more in the individual's perception of the freedom to make his own choice than in approaching career choice in any particular manner. On a practical level, this boils down to the following advice. "First, any of several careers will probably work out for you, so long as they lie within your abilities. Second, there's no need to agonize over the decision—that won't help you make a better choice. Third, and by far the most important, make the choice that feels right to you, even if this goes against what those around you think you ought to do. Listen to the voice within."

CHANGE AS A CAUSE OF UNREST

The Administrative Blahs

Careers, even when they move along a predictable path, can change in ways that generate deep dissatisfaction. For example, consider the "administrative blahs" syndrome:

Frank, who holds a Ph.D. in chemical engineering, accepts an attractive offer to join the research department of a large corporation. He works hard, makes significant contributions, and is rewarded by promotion to a supervisory position. He does well there and is promoted once again, this time to a broader administrative position. Gradually, he discovers that the time he spends on administrative matters has escalated dramatically, and the time he spends working directly with high technology has decreased to almost nothing. Ironically, his own excellence has changed the content of his career. He has become a stranger in a foreign land, ostensibly still in the same occupation as before, yet out of touch with the work he really loves. Some make the adjustment from technical to administrative work and learn to enjoy the new role. Others do not.

Obsolescence

Sometimes, technical changes happen so fast they create a wave of obsolescence [12] that sweeps across an organization.

George is in his early 40's. He has been content with his relatively modest perch on the corporate ladder, since it allows him to work at a rather complex technical task that he enjoys. Within the past year, though, George has found his education and experience becoming badly outdated. Work problems have changed in character and now he lacks the skills to handle them rapidly and well. Meanwhile, his organization notices this growing obsolescence in several departments and responds by altering its traditional up-through-the-ranks promotion policy towards an approach that favors younger, newly educated persons from technical support groups. George and his by-passed fellow workers are left with a sour taste in their mouths and a diluted commitment to their careers.

Unwittingly, the organization and the individual have collaborated in creating this obsolescence. The organization

subtly encourages the individual to isolate himself from all those areas of knowledge not directly within his current job responsibility, and the individual willingly complies. The organization drifts toward a position that views the individual as a standard, replaceable part; the inividual abdicates his responsibility for running occasional checks on the career horizon out ahead; separately or together, they hasten career unrest.

The Declining Play Factor

Career unrest can also afflict those gifted and restless people who scramble up the ladder quickly, reach a position of considerable responsibility (the position typically involves complex negotiations and fast footwork), but find themselves getting bored. As one vice president expressed it in a conversation he struck up with a stranger on a flight between Minneapolis and Detroit, "Sure, it's a new cast of characters I deal with every month or so, and the content of what we discuss varies to some degree, but over the past year I've been getting the feeling that there isn't going to be anything really new or substantially different from what I've run into before. I'm losing interest."

This sense of fading interest would fit in with a view that assumes all activities are a mixture of work and play.[13] The work component is characterized by purpose and direction; the play component is intrinsically rewarding and interesting. If repetition reduces the play component to a point where the occupation has become almost entirely work, specific career unrest sets in.

Changes in the Larger Work Environment

Changes in the larger environment surrounding work can lead to dissatisfaction with career. Public attitudes toward the US Marine Corps or the FBI can make a career in either of those two organizations either more or less attractive, and

both public attitudes and mounting malpractice suits can reduce a physician's career satisfaction.

CAREER CONTENT UNREST AND EXCESSIVE NEEDS

"Excessive needs" applies to career content unrest in a somewhat different way than to job unrest. Excessive needs can cause career content unrest—an initial career choice made in response to pressures from others could be classified as unhealthy, as could unrealistic expectations placed on a career once the choice is made. If these are causing trouble, they ought to be dealt with. By and large, though, career content unrest arises from normal change, which in itself is not unhealthy. The only lack of health lies in failing to take corrective action.

TAKING ACTION

For the individual, doing something about career content unrest means choosing from four possible lines of action.

1. Rearrange the work content to make it a better fit to current needs and expectations. This is easier to do in multi-option careers such as law or psychology than in limited option careers such as dentistry.

2. Revise expectations. This will work only if your expectations have been unrealistic. Otherwise, revising expectations means burying important feelings instead of confronting them.

3. Continue with the same work but find other ways of meeting unsatisfied needs and expectations. This may drain creativity away from your main career.

4. Change to a new line of work. This is risky, but if done right, can be very rewarding.

Career change is not an automatic answer to career unrest, but it is something to consider. Both as individuals and as a society, we have to rethink the assumption that

stable and mature persons must choose one career and stay with it forever. A career does not have to be a lifelong[14] commitment.

For the organization, doing something about career content unrest begins by facing at least two inescapable truths.

1. Promote someone into a management position and you have changed that person's career. We all know technical work and management work demand different knowledge, different skills, and different personal styles. However, we tend to ignore this truth and go right on downplaying the importance of these differences. Rarely does the organization provide truly adequate preparation and support for this kind of career change. Many good training programs can add the new knowledge and the skills, but few can change the personal style. If the potential management style is there, it can be developed by careful coaching and very carefully selected training. If it isn't there, nothing will help.

2. Rapid technological change has made obsolescence a way of life. Individuals need to take some responsibility for guarding against obsolescence, but organizations need to share this responsibility. Organizations that choose to let the individual struggle alone with obsolescence pay a heavy penalty in lost motivation and commitment.

NOTES

1. The quote is from the preface to Samuel Osipow's *Theories of Career Development*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1973.

2. D. R. Forer, "Personality factors in occupational choice," *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 1953, 13, 361-366.

3. In addition to her *The Psychology of Occupations* (New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1956), see "Early determinants of occupational choice," *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1957, 4, 212-217.

4. *Accident of birth* See T. Caplow, *The Sociology of Work*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1954, and D.L. Miller and W.H. Form, *Industrial Sociology*, N.Y., Harper, 1951.

5. *Super* A simple and direct statement of his theory in its early form appears in "A theory of vocational development," *American Psychologist*, 1953, 8, 185-190. A later and more elaborated statement appears in D. Super and M.J. Bohn, *Occupational Psychology*, Monterey, CA, Brooks-Cole, 1970.

6. *Holland* See John L. Holland, *Making Vocational Choices: A Theory of Careers*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1973.

7. *four hypotheses*

8. *six clusters* These clusters are arranged in circular form so that the Conventional cluster lies next to the Realistic. Clusters "next door" to one another are closely related; those across the circle from one another are distantly related.

9. *untrue* Another researcher came to a similar conclusion. See Paul A. Robbins, *Career Change in Males in Middle Adulthood and Its Implications for Higher Education* (doctoral dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1977), *Dissertion Abstracts International*, 1977, 37, 639-A, University Microfilms No. 77-16, 724.

10. *Erikson* "Identity and the life cycle: selected papers," *Psychological Issues*, 1959, No. 1.

11. *and others* See, for example, M.D. Galinsky and I. Fast, "Vocational choice as a form of the identity search," *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1966, 13, 89-92; and H.H. Wolff, "Crisis points and problems of identity," *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 1972, 16, 229-234.

12. *obsolescence* R.A. Rothman, *Knowledge Obsolescence among Professionals: a Study of Career, Personal, and Organizational Factors Related to Technological Obsolescence among Engineers* (doctoral dissertation, Purdue University, 1969), *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 1969, 30, 1655-A, University Microfilms No. 69-17, 248.

13. *play* H. Day, "Work and leisure: two sides of the same coin," *Canadian Counselor*, 1972, 6, 251-259.

14. *lifelong* See, for example, Rhee Lyon, "Beyond the conventional career: some speculations," *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1965, 12, 153-158.

15. Robert Oliver, Midlife Unrest, Midcareer Unrest, and Second Careers Among Executive and Professional Males, Age 35-55 (Doctoral Dissertation, California School of Professional Psychology, 1978, (University Microfilms No. 80-27, 214).

Chapter 9

Career Self Unrest

Career self unrest is the broadest form of career unrest, so broad, in fact, that it lies closer to midlife unrest than to career content unrest and job unrest.

To position career self unrest more precisely, it resembles career content unrest and job unrest in that all three express discontent with some aspect of work; it differs from career content unrest and job unrest in that the discontent is directed inward onto the self rather than outward onto the work or the work environment. Making this distinction is important, since releasing the creative potential bound up in career self unrest calls for a different strategy than that for career content unrest and job unrest. Confusing career self unrest with the other two forms of career unrest sends the corrective action off in the wrong direction.

Career self unrest resembles midlife unrest in that both have an inward focus. Both deal in self-questions and self-doubts about what has happened in the past and what might happen in the future, and both evoke the painful "what ifs?" of missed opportunities and fading dreams. In career self unrest, though, these inner hesitations concern themselves with work and the work environment without placing direct blame on either; in midlife unrest, the hesitations spread to non-work areas such as relationships, values, and the personal identity constructed from thousands of small decisions.

Since career self unrest is, in effect, a special case of midlife unrest, it seems worthwhile to begin with a brief review of our present knowledge about midlife unrest. This highly selective survey will be concentrated on midlife unrest among executives and professionals.

MIDLIFE UNREST

Ten years ago, it would have been easy to summarize and comment on nearly everything written about the inner life of the normal middle aged adult. With only a few notable exceptions,[1] both popular and scholarly writers operated on the assumption that well adjusted middle age automatically excluded such puerile self indulgences as an identity crisis or career unrest. Now, of course, things are different. During the past few years, much has been written and said about midlife unrest, and public interest in the topic shows few signs of tapering off. By picking and choosing among the now abundant supply of facts, theories, and speculations about midlife unrest, it is possible to find answers to some basic questions.

Size of the Problem

To get a sense of how widespread midlife unrest is, begin by looking at what is happening to the median age of the US population.[2] It has begun to rise rapidly, and will continue to do so well into the next century. From a low of 16 years in 1790, the median age crept up to 25 by 1970; it is projected to reach 30 by 1981, 35 in 2000, and 40 in 2030. Then, look at the population bulge (the fastest growing age group). In the 1970's, the bulge was mostly in the age 24-34 group. In the early 80s, it is moving to the age 35-44 bracket. This latter group is expected to grow from 23 million to 41 million between 1975 and 2000, an increase of 80 percent. In short, the total US population is growing older, and the middle aged part of our population is expanding rapidly.

What proportion of the middle aged experience midlife unrest? Three research studies suggest some answers to that question.

A study of 1100 middle aged professionals and managers [3] showed that about 80 percent of this group stated they had experienced a period of intense turmoil during their thirties and forties. Another study of more than 200 persons [4] compared four different age groups selected from a middle class population: high school seniors, newlyweds, a middle aged group, and a near-retirement-age group. The middle aged group was clearly different from the others in that they showed more signs of distress. They had the least hope for the future, a higher alcoholism and suicide rate, more admissions to mental hospitals, and more physical illness. Also, middle aged men reported more difficulties than middle aged women. Evidently, the environment faced by middle aged men exacts a higher toll than that faced by middle aged women, or by either men or women in any other age group. No one is sure why.

A third research report summarizes the results of several studies extending over a 25 year period (1948-1973) and including about 2500 persons.[5] During midlife, these persons reported a pattern of increased accidents and suicide attempts, and increased feelings of alienation, depression, and apathy.

So, although no one knows the exact dimensions of midlife unrest, all of these studies suggest that it is a frequent and widespread occurrence.

Recognizing Midlife Unrest

If midlife unrest is so widespread, it seems reasonable to ask why it isn't more noticeable. Any of us can look around and see many middle aged people, yet few of them show signs of severe emotional distress. We have to keep reminding ourselves that the signs won't be that obvious. Remember

the pact of silence that keeps both midlife unrest and career unrest under wraps. Most executives and professionals have developed the ability to keep their outer lives under control regardless of what is going on inside, though this control is often imposed at great psychological cost. Still, the signs are present. They often show up as slight exaggerations of habits or characteristics that were already there: three drinks swallowed quickly instead of two sipped slowly; clothing just a little more vivid in color or extreme in design than is usual for this person; an extra degree of nervous intensity in the laughter over a sexual joke; more throat clearing than usual; for men, an increased propensity for touching secretaries; for women, an expanded interest in eye contact with males in the supermarket checkout line; for both, an increased tendency to talk about past successes, more hesitancy before committing to a course of action.

The important thing is to recognize that self-questions, self-doubts, and psychological change do occur in midlife. Occasionally, they emerge in dramatic or even flamboyant ways; more often, they follow a subdued, less visible course. In either case, the internal pressures and changes are real.

How unhealthy a condition is midlife unrest? To put that question into perspective, consider two other questions: How unhealthy is a 14-year-old boy's awkward coordination and cracking voice? Or a 14-year-old girl's mixture of embarrassment and excitement over her rapidly developing curves?

Both the adolescent and the middle aged person are going through a process of change and adaptation that are part of preparing for the life ahead. If there is any unhealthiness, it lies in how the individual copes with and adapts to the change process, not in the change itself. How the people around the middle aged person cope with the midlife change process is also very important. We expect the adolescent to experience some growing pains and usually make

allowance for them. On the contrary, most people don't make any allowance for growing pains in adults, since they aren't supposed to have any.

Physical Causes

No one can deny the reality of the physiological changes that go along with increasing age, yet these changes in themselves are rarely a significant source of midlife unrest. It is the inner attitude toward these changes that dictates how much of their effect will be translated into midlife unrest. Also, individuals vary in the symptoms they experience.

When thinking about the physical symptoms associated with aging, it may be helpful to separate them into three clusters: those physical symptoms due to normal aging (loss of physical coordination, lower energy levels); those usually associated with physical stress (ulcers, cardiovascular disease); and less usual symptoms tied to physiological causes (Klinefelter's syndrome). Symptoms of the first group are nearly universal; those of the second are frequent; those of the third are rare. None of these three classes of physical symptoms is a necessary part of midlife unrest, but any one of them can exacerbate awareness of it.

By and large, physical aging is a factor in midlife unrest only to the extent the individual allows or wants it to be.

Psychological Causes

Agreement on the specific psychological causes of unrest is far from unanimous. At one extreme are those who see midlife change and development as resulting primarily from social institutions and expectations that impose change from the outside; at the other extreme are those who see the change and development as resulting primarily from a kind of inexorable inner clock that imposes change from the inside.

Naturally, no investigator of midlife unrest will admit to believing that the forces for adult development are totally environmental or totally internal, but there is a definite tendency to lean one direction or the other, and to see the facts that support that position. As a general rule, those who state their positions in very broad terms offer a balanced view; those who make detailed interpretations of their research results and present their ideas in more exact form gravitate toward either the environmental or the internal explanation. This is not a criticism, it is simply a fact. Midlife unrest is still a largely unexplored and unexplained phenomenon, and attempts to describe it with clarity and exactness will almost inevitably miss or distort certain important points in order to emphasize others.

The best known example of the balanced view is that of Erik Erikson.[7] He sees personality development as a gradual unfolding that depends both on internal psychological and physiological factors and on external social factors; this unfolding continues throughout the entire life course from infancy through old age. He divides life into eight stages, five of them complete by about age 21, the remaining three spread out over the period between young adulthood and old age. At each stage there is a psychological task or issue to be resolved. For example, the midlife adult must solve the dilemma of generativity vs. stagnation (generativity comes from a continued sense of personal growth and contribution), and the older adult, facing the inevitability of death, must solve the dilemma of integrity vs. despair. Each of these dilemmas involves an inner struggle, often carried on at the unconscious level, and an encounter between the individual and his particular environment.

Erikson's ideas have been of great value in stimulating thought about adult development and in providing a framework

for research, but they are more a collection of broad themes than a lucid explanation of what happens within the midlife adult.

An example of the social-shaping explanation of adult development is supplied by Marjorie Fiske Lowenthal [8] and her colleagues. They have focused much of their research effort on personality changes that are triggered by marker events in life, such as marriage, the death of a parent, the birth of a first grandchild, or retirement. The value of this emphasis is self-evident. Many persons have experienced these marker events as the beginning of a period of careful reflection that produces important changes in attitude and behavior. The limitation, of course, is that other periods of reflection and change occur with no visible trigger event. Nevertheless, it is plain that the environment around us exerts great influence on the expectations we place on ourselves, and meeting—or failing to meet—these expectations can generate inner turmoil and changed values.

As for the "inner clock" explanation of midlife unrest, the best and most carefully worked out set of ideas in this area to date is that developed by Daniel Levinson [9] and his colleagues. Levinson states his basic approach in a way that puts almost equal emphasis on internal and social forces in adult development, but his way of organizing and explaining his research results emphasizes chronological age as a controlling factor in adult development.

Based on lengthy and intensive interviews with 40 carefully chosen men—ten blue collar workers, ten biologists, ten novelists, and ten executives—Levinson draws conclusions on which he builds a life-stage theory far more detailed than that of Erikson. Erikson assigns three major issues to be dealt with in adulthood (intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, integrity vs. despair) and places each of these in very general time frames (young adulthood, adulthood, mature

age). In contrast, Levinson identifies numerous issues and tasks to be dealt with and is very explicit about assigning certain tasks to certain age periods. For example, between the ages of 28 and 33, the typical adult male works at correcting flaws and limitations in the adult life structure (marriage, career, priorities) he established in his early twenties. If he leaves these issues unsolved, he will be severely handicapped when he encounters the issues to be dealt with at the next stage in life.

For our purposes, the chief virtue of Levinson's view is his sensitive and telling way of identifying a wide range of issues that a male must deal with, consciously or unconsciously, as he moves through his life cycle. (Whether women move through the same age related issues is as yet unknown.) The chief limitation of Levinson's view is its inflexibility. Individuals—either male or female—in our society are complex and changing organisms interacting with an even more complex and rapidly changing environment. However accurately Levinson's scheme may portray the life course of 40—or even 400—males, it seems reasonable to believe that the life course of other males may follow a somewhat different track. For example, Levinson's rigorous emphasis on hetrosexual relationships as a central life theme creates a Procrustean bed that simply will not fit that proportion of the population who are predominantly homosexual and find their most meaningful relationship with others of the same sex. Also, the emphasis on marriage and children by age 30 does not fit dual career couples who live together but postpone marriage, children, or both.

It seems probable that all adults experience some kind of inner change and development throughout their lives. This continuous developmental process is generated by realities and forces within the person, such as the awareness of a life more than half lived, or a strong drive toward personal growth.

It is also generated by realities and forces outside the person, such as the death of a parent, or social customs and expectations of a given family or community or profession.

For some adults, this process of growth and change exhibits itself in a series of dramatic and visible changes. For other adults, the process is almost invisible. But for most, growth and change in the adult years follows a middle course, sometimes gradual and gentle, at other times sharp, painful, and turbulent. It is these periods of pain and turbulence that we call midlife unrest, but both turbulence and gradual change are part of the same adult development process, and both are healthy responses to the need to survive and grow. By and large, the only unhealthy part of midlife unrest lies in the way we manage—or fail to manage—these responses.

CAREER SELF UNREST

Although career self unrest can exist separately from midlife unrest, it occurs more typically as part of an overall process that calls into question the meaning of one's whole being.

Three Varieties Of Career Self Unrest

The unrest comes in several forms. Three of the most frequent are burnout, hesitation, and sterility.

Burnout

The central meaning of burnout is lost creativity.

Brian, the somewhat dissatisfied stayer described in an earlier vignette, holds an enviable position as a full professor in an Ivy League university. His ability and accomplishments are genuine, yet he finds himself entertaining secret thoughts of fleeing to what seems to him a much less demanding position. His desire to run from a successful career has little to do with either the work content or the work environment.

Instead, it rises from a fear (as yet carefully concealed) that his creativity has burned out. Today, only he knows the guilty secret. Tomorrow, his colleagues will see and begin to whisper. How can he face them? Flight is the answer.

Often, the dominant feeling in burnout is panic. "My creativity has dried up. All these years it just kept pouring out so effortlessly and now that it's gone I don't have a single idea about how to get it back." Needless to say, hiding these feelings from public view becomes a constant burden that exacts exorbitant psychological costs.

Hesitation

This form of general career unrest is much easier to ignore than burnout. It emerges in subtle ways: postponing small decisions, overanalyzing the past, tending more and more to the unspoken assumption that the future will be a simple extrapolation of the past and present. Ironically, it often afflicts those who, earlier in their careers, earned a "cool hand Luke" reputation as steely nerved risk takers. Now, they seem frozen in place.

The person experiencing this uncertainty and increasing conservatism often plows doggedly onward, constantly reassuring himself or herself that everything is normal, and ignoring the dismay of work colleagues who look on with growing apprehension as unmade decisions pile up.

Sterility

This version of general career unrest might be labelled "bring back the thrill." Over the years, the joy and challenge of work have slipped away. Yes, there are still occasional bright spots, but much of the work day (or week, or month) has lost its luster. Typically, individuals in this situation say, "The work environment is OK, and the work itself is as good as anything else I can think of, but it isn't fun anymore.

Something's wrong. On the other hand, what could I change to that would be better?" This is not dissatisfaction with a specific career, it is dissatisfaction with any career. Something within the person is choking off the natural pleasure of work.

Causes of Career Self Unrest

These examples suggest that general career unrest is more nebulous than specific career unrest or job unrest. Also, since its causes lie in the interaction between the individual and his or her inner self, career self unrest cannot be corrected by acting on the environment (changing jobs or changing careers). The principal changes must occur within the person. Clues about the nature of these corrective actions can be found by looking at the various sources of career self unrest.

Normal Change and Development

Increasing age[10] is the prime cause of career self unrest. On the most obvious level, increasing age makes itself known through the aspiration-achievement gap. Each succeeding year brings inescapable reminders of inelastic time closing in on unachieved goals and neglected dreams. The fact that this experience is almost universal does not make it less disturbing.

The aspiration-achievement gap[11] measures two kinds of frustration. One is the knowldege that career goals (spoken and unspoken) have not been matched by actual achievement. Put more bluntly, that means realizing that one's climb up the organizational pyramid or professional ladder has topped out several levels below the altitude imagined in ambitious youth. The other frustration is the knowledge that those important dreams and ideas pushed aside time after time in favor of "more practical considerations" have now slipped out of reach. They are gone, but not forgotten. Those few individuals who, having succeeded far beyond their expectations, escape the

first frustration are unlikely to escape the second. Until one resolves the aspiration-achievement gap in some satisfactory way, it continues to choke off creativity, confidence, and work satisfaction.

Increasing age makes some measure of career self unrest almost inevitable. This is due to the facts of adult development, rather than to any shortcomings in the individual. Gradually, we are coming to recognize that the middle period of life is not the psychologically stable era we had thought. Like both adolescence and older age, midlife is full of change. Midlife unrest itself is a misleading term, since it implies relative stability from, say, ages 25 to 40, then a brief period of turbulence from 40 to 45, followed by sunny skies and more stability until retirement. Instead, psychological change continues throughout life. Each of us is constantly rebuilding his or her life structure. Just as one moves from one physical abode to another during a lifetime—one-room apartment, small house, large house, condominium, with each move reflecting an important change in one's general life situation, so one moves from one life structure to another, each of them built to accomodate a certain life period.

These changing life structures form a central theme in the Levinson study mentioned earlier in this chapter. Levinson divides the age 22-50 era into five periods, each five to seven years long. For each period, there are key tasks to be carried out, and for each period there are more and less successful modes of dealing with these key tasks. Careless work on the life structure at any age creates handicaps for dealing with the tasks of the next period.

All of us wrestle with different angels at different ages. These inner encounters are not a sign of weakness or poor mental health, but are simply part of normal adult development. The better we understand these age related psychological tasks, the better equipped we are to handle them well

and to convert career self unrest into creative contributions to both self and career.

Unrest is produced not only by normal adult development, but also by other events and realizations:

- the discovery that the vigorous and successful pursuit of certain career goals has been carried out at the expense of values and relationships which one had no intention of violating;
- the gradual awareness that the pressure to prove oneself has actually dulled the ability to excel;
- success itself: rapid upward mobility means repetitive breaking of old attachments to persons, and to comfortable and well known work skills; for some individuals, a career marked by a continuous series of attachments and separations can be a wrenching experience that must be concealed from self and others;
- a mismatch between what the environment expects in the conduct of a career and what the individual truly wants: the norm for our upward striving culture is vertical ascent, but this is often a poor fit with inner values and desires.

Unrest can also arise from assuming that one cannot achieve a desired position, prestige, or income level if he admits weakness or expresses deep inner feelings. (In some organizations, the assumption is entirely accurate.) Consequently, feelings are cut off or bottled up, personal style loses its varied hues and takes on a uniform gray color, and life's most uncomfortable question becomes, "I've met all my goals, why can't I be happy?"

Perhaps most important of all, unrest can be generated by shaping forces in the environment. Each of us develops inner goals based on inner value systems. But rewards and

pressures from the environment have a way of gradually reshaping these inner goals. When this reshaping influence produces new goals that displace or deny the original goals, career self unrest sets in. The displaced values will not go away. "Truth crushed to earth will rise again."

Excessive Needs As A Cause Of Career Self Unrest

Only a small proportion of career self unrest rises from excessive needs, and these conditions tend to be exaggerations of normal behavior.

Perhaps the most common example is found in those individuals who, for unconscious reasons, set their self expectations at an outrageously unrealistic level, and who turn a deaf ear to any suggestion that these self expectations be revised.

Also, there are those individuals who find a perverse reward in expecting the worst from their careers, who expect to be passed over for promotion and who become skilled in manipulating the environment so that these expectations will indeed come true.

Career Self Unrest And Failures In The Coping System

General career self unrest can be accentuated by the inability to handle career roadblocks. Research Project A showed a sharp contrast between Satisfied Stayers and Dissatisfied Stayers in how they handle career disappointment during the age 35-40 period. Compared to Dissatisfied Stayers, Satisfied Stayers evidently have better early warning systems for picking up incipient signs of career roadblocks, and better and more imaginative ways of dealing with these roadblocks. They are better at building and using a network of influential

colleagues, and they show a better sense of timing as to when a given action will work and when it won't.

Even the most competent Dissatisfied Stayer seems to follow the philosophy of, "If I just work hard and don't bother anybody, somebody will notice me and reward me." Occasionally, this approach works; more often, it means frustration and disappointment. The less competent Dissatisfied Stayers complicate their work relationships with unresolved personal problems, scorn the development of work contacts as cheap politics, and, especially under stress, make inappropriate comments or take inappropriate actions.

Since these infelicities are more felt than seen by others in the work environment, they exist as half-recognized patterns that obstruct a person's flow of contributions. Usually, others in the work environment lump these patterns together into that classically vague evaluation: "X has trouble in getting along with people." Until this trouble is more clearly specified and brought to X's attention, the largely unconscious behavior patterns and attitudes that underlie it will continue to sabotage X's effort to make creative contributions. This limits his or her career progress, therefore producing more unrest and intensifying the self defeating process.

By far the greatest number of career self unrest experiences arise from the normal patterns of adult development. But if the individual, the organization, and society stand passively aside while these patterns develop and expand, everyone loses. There is no standard, inviolate pattern destined to run its inexorable course regardless of attempts to intervene. Quite the contrary. Prompt, on-target actions can reduce the duration and the losses of burnout, hesitation, and sterility, and prompt action can prevent incipient unrest from deteriorating into a permanent condition of dissatisfaction.

NOTES

1. For example: S.L. Pressey and R.G. Kuhlen, *Psychological Development through the Life Span*, New York, Harper & Row, 1957: E. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* 2nd ed., New York, Norton, 1963: J.W. Gardner, *Self Renewal*, New York, Harper & Row, 1964.

2. A summary of these projections and their societal implications can be found in "The graying of America," *Newsweek*, February 28, 1977. A summary slanted toward those interested in marketing can be found in the December 10, 1979, issue of *Sales & Marketing Management*.

3. D. Schultz, "Managing the middle aged Manager," *Personnel* November 1974, pp. 8-17.

4. Marjorie Fiske Lowenthal, Magda Thurnher, David Chiriboga, et al., *Four Stages of Life: a Comparative Study of Women and Men Facing Transition*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1975.

5. *2500 persons* K. Rogers "Crisis at the midpoint of life," *New Society*, August 1974, pp. 413-415.

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8. See, for example, M.F. Lowenthal and D. Chiriboga, "Social stress and adaptation: toward a life-course perspective," in C. Eisdorfer and M. Lawton, eds., *Psychology of Adult Development and Aging*, Washington, D.C., American Psychological Association, 1973.

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10. *increasing age* A classic presentation of the conscious and unconscious anxieties that accompany the aging process can be found in Elliott Jaques' "Death and the mid-life crisis," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 1965, 4, pp. 502-514.

11. *aspiration-achievement gap* See O.G. Brim, "Theories of the male mid-life crisis," *Counseling Psychologist*, 1976, 6, pp. 2-9.

Chapter 10

The Costs of Career Unrest

Most people who experience career unrest are responsible and conscientious persons who will contiue to meet the surface obligations of their work in some fashion. They will do less work and they will do it less well, but this has only a modest effect on productivity. The important loss comes from the way career unrest cripples a person's ability to make creative contributions.

Individuals have the power to make two kinds of contributions through work: maintenance contribution and creative contribution. Maintenance contribution means the more visible aspects of getting the job done; these are the surface obligations that will probably continue to be met despite career unrest. Creative contribution means the spark and extra thrust that come from commitment and good ideas; losing these qualities causes the real drag on productivity.

Consequently, the principal route leading from career unrest to increased costs looks like this:

CAREER UNREST → CONSTRICTED CREATIVITY → WEAKENED PRODUCTIVITY → INCREASED COSTS

Constricted creativity is not the only way in which career unrest adds to costs, but it is by all odds the most important.

The following thoughts on the cost of career unrest deal only with the impact of lost creativity.

COST TO THE INDIVIDUAL: CONSTRICTED CREATIVITY

Career unrest first makes its presence known, as any of us who have encountered it can testify, as a sense of dissatisfaction connected with work. We may make elaborate unconscious efforts to deny this dissatisfaction, but at some level we must acknowledge its presence.

Lowered Self-Esteem

As the unrest spreads throughout the person's private world, it cripples self-esteem ("If I'm so intelligent and effective, why can't I figure out how to handle this? Nothing I do seems to work"). Career unrest and impaired self-esteem combine to exert an inexorable downward force on the creative spirit, squeezing it into a constricted impotent imitation of its former self.

For the professional or executive, on-the-job creativity translates into the ability to recognize that something needs to be improved, to specify the situation accurately, and to generate fresh (or at least usable) ideas on how to solve it, in whole or in part. Knowing from past accomplishments that one has this ability breeds confidence. Watching oneself lose it breeds fear.

In a moment of blazing candor, one executive described his encounter with lost creativity. "Problems that used to seem challenging but well within my grasp now seem bigger than I am. Instead of scanning the horizon for the $100,000 problems I should be dealing with, I find myself gravitating toward the $10,000 problems. They're the safe ones I know I can handle." Presumably, he finds the $10,000 problems on the desks of his subordinates—or on the desks of their subordinates.

Troubled Interpersonal Relationships

Often, career unrest has a debilitating effect on interpersonal relationships. Job unrest is probably the most dis-

ruptive in this respect, since troubled interactions with the work environment may breed dissatisfaction with the individuals who people that environment. Soon, tense, overanxious, angry communications become the norm. The angry communications may be confined to fantasy encounters in the mind of the person experiencing job unrest, or they may be carried out openly. In either case, the work environment becomes enemy territory, and the incentive to search for opportunities to contribute disappears.

Meanwhile, frustrations collected at work are carried home and redistributed among family and friends, placing a strain on those relationships. Even the most tolerant and loving listener has only so much capacity for another's discontent.

Career content unrest and career self unrest affect interpersonal relationships with family and friends in much the same way as job unrest, but they affect interpersonal relationships at work in a somewhat different fashion. Both career content unrest, where the dissatisfaction centers around work content, and career self unrest, where the dissatisfaction is more with oneself than with the work or the work environment, are likely to cause withdrawal from work colleagues rather than angry exchanges with them. Withdrawal is a natural reaction (who wants to admit to colleagues that work has become a drag?) but it reduces the amount of professional exchange, the intelligent and animated discussion of work problems with work colleagues. Losing this kind of stimulation leads to reduced creativity.

Decreased Sense of Work as Fun

Research Project A[1] produced an unexpected but unsurprising finding concerning the importance of seeing work as fun. The finding was unexpected since nothing in the research questionnaire asked the men who took part in the study to give their views on the play factor in work. Despite this,

25 percent of the Satisfied Stayers mentioned this idea in some form when talking about their career satisfactions. They said things like, "I enjoy what I'm doing," "I'm always solving new problems," "I look forward to coming to work." In contrast, none of the Dissatisfied Stayers said anything that suggested work might be fun. The finding was not surprising, since it fits with everyday observation. People who like their work see at least part of it as play.

The direct connection between play and creativity[2] has long been apparent. Playing with and around elements of the status quo puts them in new perspective and opens new possibilities for using, revising or combining these elements. It seems probable that a sense of work as fun contributes directly to generating fresh ideas about how to do things better. Any form of career unrest drains the fun element out of work, taking with it an important source of career creativity.

A Ceiling On Creativity

For the individual, the chief cost of career unrest is lost creativity. Career unrest reduces self-esteem, deteriorates interpersonal relationships, and takes the fun out of work. All three of these losses cause serious damage to career creativity.

Career creativity fluctuates with career motivation. It is as though motivation sets the ceiling for creativity. When career motivation is high, career creativity has room to operate in expanded form; when career motivation is low, career creativity is reduced to a very limited range.

COST TO THE ORGANIZATION: WEAKENED PRODUCTIVITY

How Productivity and Creativity are Related

All organizations begin their lives in a burst of creativity and hard work. Anyone who has taken part in the early stages of an organization's existence can easily recall the high energy levels, the enthusiasm, the apparently inexhaustible

supply of ideas about how to solve this or improve that. Along with the creative enthusiasm goes a great deal of pragmatic detail. Creative contribution and maintenance contribution are both present in large quantities.

As the organization stabilizes, it continues to move ahead, propelled by a steady flow of maintenance contributions and by the continued thrust of creative contributions. One part of the creative thrust comes from the original idea that brought the organization into existence, and the rest comes from new contributions made since then.

We could label the original contributions that brought the organization into being as C-1.[3] All ensuing creative contributions can be called C-2, and maintenance contributions can be called M. Together, C-1, C-2, and M supply the power that carries the organization forward. M contributions are arithmetic in value, C-1 and C-2 contributions are exponential.

As the organization moves into a more mature phase, the balance changes. Maintenance contribution provides more and more of the total thrust, while the proportional input of both the original contribution and current creativity decline. Give the organization a favorable environment and steady management, and this mature phase can last a long time. Favorable environment includes abundant natural resources and an expanding economy; steady management includes efficiently used maintenance contribution, supported by skillfully applied short term goals. As long as the goals are met, growth continues and everyone is happy.

Unfortunately, the organization comes to believe that growth depends solely on one original idea (C-1) and reasonable amounts of hard work (M). New ideas (C-2) tend to disrupt the march toward meeting short term goals, so they are subtly discouraged at all levels in the organization. Inevitably, production declines. The organization, being sensitive to tangible measures of performance, tries to do some-

thing about this. With its fixation on C-1 + M as the formula for growth and success, the organization assumes that the logical way to increase productivity is to increase M, which means hiring more people. New people bring with them the potential for fresh inputs of C-2, but the larger and more stable the organization becomes the higher the impedance to these fresh inputs. The newly hired worker usually finds that M ("Do it our way") is welcome, but C-2 is not.

Sometimes, organizations display an almost childlike faith in the eternal potency of the C-1 + M combination. When the thrust from C-1 weakens and productivity drops off, these organizations redouble their efforts to increase M in the vain hope that this will correct the situation.

This hardening of the creative arteries is by no means limited to for-profit corporations. It can happen in government departments, school systems, religious denominations, universities, hospitals, professional associations, and organized labor.

Inadequate Efforts to Stimulate C-2

It follows, then, that even in good times the mature organization needs to find consistent ways to stimulate C-2 throughout the organization. Progressive organizations can be surprisingly erratic on this point. Without exception, they invest in technical research and in some kind of planning process, and assume (or hope) that this will provide enough creativity to keep the organization healthy. Even at best, these formal efforts are limited. Often, they do not focus on creativity: research departments can quietly mutate into non-creative modes; corporate planning staffs can become entranced with recondite analyses that become their own goal, or, even less imaginatively, can drift into the role of whistle-blowing policemen who keep traffic moving but forget to worry about where it is headed.

Another potent source of C-2 is capital investment.[4] The organization buys someone else's C-1 in the form of better

plant and equipment, and brings this on stream. The low current rate of capital investment in the US has become a matter of public concern, suggesting that inputs of C-2 from that source are declining.

What is the principal source of C-2? In my view, R & D departments and planning staffs and capital investment contribute only a portion of the total C-2 required to add new thrust to an organization's life systems. Another vital portion of C-2, perhaps the major portion, must come from the collective, informal, often unrewarded inputs of individuals everywhere in the organization who see and act on situations that beg for improvement.

Other Attempts to Stimulate Productivity

Progressive organizations also give thought to how compensation programs can be designed to motivate better productivity, but even the best compensation programs tend to push individual employees toward better maintenance contributions rather than toward creative contributions. Weaker compensation programs do little more than try to hold dissatisfaction at bay.

The informal reward and punishment system that operates in every organization tends, in mature organizations, to foster cautious base touching more than creativity. Reasonable amounts of caution and base touching are a healthy preventive against impulsive decision making, but they are aimed at preserving productivity rather than raising it.

Management By Objective (MBO) is an important management tool in many organizations, and deservedly so for its focus on tangible results. Unfortunately, MBO is far better suited to eliciting M than C-2. We lack a parallel program for stimulating and encouraging creativity.

Downward Pressures on the Organization

As if all this lopsided focus on M at the expense of C-2 were not difficult enough to correct, recent changes in the

economic environment and in individual attitudes toward work have introduced new complexities. We no longer live in the best of times. The era of growth from the end of World War II to perhaps the early 1970s is now history. Natural resources are no longer plentiful, the economy has slowed to what appears to be a long-term crawl, and national productivity has committed the ultimate heresy by nosing downward.

Our low growth era is complicated still further by public sentiment, organized movements, and laws aimed at such worthy but costly objectives as protecting the physical environment or enhancing the position of various special interest groups who believe (often correctly) that they have been taken advantage of. These movements generate regulations, limitations, and changes that place new burdens on productivity in both public and private organizations.

Ineffective Counteraction

These new stresses spur organizations to devise actions which they hope will improve output and productivity. The general nature of these actions can be predicted by observing what happens to any organism under stress. (The behavior of organizations shows remarkable similarities to the behavior of animals.)

An organism subjected to stress from an outer environment over which it has little control usually responds by regressing to a more primitive position, one that promises more safety and more control over the territory it still holds. The organization under stress also looks for a position of greater safety and for ways to increase its control over what is happening. Almost inevitably, the organization comes to see its employees as a controllable possession that can be marshaled to defend the productivity level. This means regressing to a greater reliance on its role as powerful parent, demanding better performance, setting tighter limits, and carrying out other actions familiar as part of the organizational "screw tightening"[5] syndrome. Some of these actions may well be timely antidotes

for the organizational blubber that collects during growth periods, and some of these actions may stimulate greater maintenance contribution, but none is likely to do anything toward increasing creative contribution, which is what really matters. The very actions which the beleaguered organization hopes will increase productivity have instead sent its best source of productivity into hiding.

Career Unrest, C-2, And Productivity

Consider the impact on productivity when even a modest scattering of employees experience career unrest. Even if the unrest occurs in relatively mild form, maintenance contribution decreases and creative contribution congeals. This creative contribution is lost for as long as the career unrest lasts. The total contribution lost to career unrest in any organization at any one point in time depends on the number of employees who are experiencing unrest, and the severity of each case.

THE COST TO SOCIETY: A DOWNWARD SPIRAL

The costs society pays for career unrest branch out in several directions. On the most visible level, lower productivity means higher economic costs which must be passed on. Curiously, most of us tend to think in a very provincial way about economic costs. We think of them as products (a tube of toothpaste) or services (delivery of the morning newspaper) which we buy and pay for in a conscious way. When these costs increase, we notice them. But we also pay for government, education, public construction, and charities. Reduced creative contribution in any sector of society hurts productivity and increases our cost of living.

More Conservative, Less Creative

The weakened productivity generated by career unrest leads to other kinds of costs. In a recent essay, William C. Norris,[6] founder of Control Data Corporation, writes about his concern over the lack of creativity in large organizations and

the increasingly serious losses to society that follow from this.

He begins by contrasting large organizations in business and industry with small businesses. Small organizations must innovate and take risks or they will die. Their successful innovations yield increased productivity and new jobs, and help to subdue inflation. Larger organizations see innovation as an expensive process requiring substantial long term development and startup costs (they see innovation only in terms of C-1, and ignore the potential of C-2). Sometimes, large organizations will buy innovation by acquiring small companies. As a consequence, over the past ten years or so, total employment by large companies in the US has remained about level; increases in private sector employment have come primarily from small companies.

But, Norris continues, big business shares its apathetic and reactionary profile with the education establishment, private foundations, organized labor, churches, and government. All these organizations tend more and more to respond to major problems in their own sectors by conserving rather than by innovating, and by retreating to a more isolated position rather than by looking for opportunities to cooperate with other sectors. Norris concludes by calling for greater risk taking and creative cooperation among large organizations in these major sectors.

There is no need to argue over what role career unrest has played in causing this state of affairs. It is enough to know that the apathetic and reactionary condition Norris describes is almost guaranteed to stifle opportunities to make creative contributions. This generates successive waves of career unrest which depress creative contribution still further, perpetuating the downward spiral.

Unintended Enmities

At the societal level, this slide toward constricted and protective thinking cuts off new prospectives, alienates the various sectors of society (labor, government, education, et al.) from one another, and fosters enmities.

To cite just one familiar example, consider the unintended enmity that has grown up between small businesses and government regulatory agencies. One government agency, with the best intentions, sets about trying to protect consumer interests; another tries to insure equal employment opportunity; still others establish and impose regulatory actions they see as necessary to carry out their particular charters. To comply with these regulations, small businesses find themselves spending increasing time with government matters, and spending an increasing proportion of overhead to keep records and file reports. Most small businessmen and businesswomen see the potential value of these efforts, but even the most forbearing entrepreneur begins to feel enmity toward the faceless government agencies whom he or she sees as imposing their arbitrary will with no consideration of its cost. Meanwhile, the individuals in those agencies may interpret the entrepreneur's resistance as an attempt to evade public responsibility.

Alienation of this sort introduces more costs. The entrepreneur feels overburdened [7] and dissatisfied, and has less time and energy for creative contribution. In small organizations, the drop in creativity makes itself felt almost immediately. It holds back growth and cuts off new jobs. On a broader plane, alienation widens the gap between the public and the private sector, making creative cooperation more and more difficult. It constricts the flow of original economic creativity, the C-1 that launches new business organizations; and, in the regulatory agencies, it discourages fresh inputs of C-2 that might improve the way regulations are designed and enforced.

A Joyless Race

Wherever and whenever unrest occurs, and for however long it endures, it constricts the flow of creative contribution from the individual to society. Blocked career creativity deadens the pleasure nerve that connects person and work into a living whole. Suddenly, without knowing exactly how or why,

one finds career motivation deteriorating into a joyless race towards someone else's goal. If pleasure is to be found in life, it must be sought outside work. Once the search for pleasure and a sense of creativity turns away from work, we are reduced to rootless wanderers, putting into this and that leisure time port in the hope of finding a home for our desire to do something that draws on our creative abilities.

ON TO ACTION

At some point, exploration ends and action begins. If career unrest represents a costly form of blocked creativity, it is well worth doing something about. For some thoughts on how this action might begin, see Part III.

NOTES

1. Robert Oliver, Midlife Unrest, Midcareer Unrest, and Second Careers Among Executive and Professional Males, Age 35-55 (Doctoral dissertation, California School of Professional Psychology, 1978, (University Microfilms No. 80-27, 414).

2. See J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: a Study of the Play Element in Culture,* Boston, Beacon Press, 1955.

3. *C-1* In an article in *Business Week* (March 10, 1980, p. 23), Arthur Levitt, Jr., cites research that shows that small companies generate 66 percent of new jobs in the US, and produce 24 times as many innovations per research dollar than the largest companies.

4. Lester C. Thurow, in an article in *The Los Angeles Times,* March 11, 1980, Part IV, p. 3, gives the following comparison of capital investment as a percentage of GNP: Japan 20 percent, Germany 18 percent, U.S. 10 percent.

5. See Frank A. Weil's "Management's drag on productivity," in *Business Week,* December 3, 1979, p. 14.

6. *William C. Norris* "A risk-avoiding, selfish society," *Business Week,* January 28, 1980, p. 20.

7. *overburdened entrepreneur* For a relatively temperate view of the effects of government restrictions, see Murray L. Weidenbaum's "Restrictions are hurting business" in *The Los Angeles Times,* November 13, 1979, Part IV, p. 3.

Chapter 11

What The Individual Can Do

There is no need to wait for someone else to make the first move. True, an organization has far more power to act on a broad scale than does one individual, but as an individual you can act on your own behalf, and you have the unique advantage of private knowledge—you can recognize immediately the actions which seem right for you.

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

Essentially, you need to find answers to three questions.

1. What form of career unrest do I have, and what are its particular characteristics in my case?

Your answers to this question will tell you which of three target areas to concentrate on: the interaction between you and your work environment, the interaction between you and the work itself, or the interaction between you and your inner self.

2. What is the main cause of this unrest, and how is this condition holding back my ability to make a creative contribution?

Your answers to this question will tell you which of three underlying conditions you most need to deal with: the effects of normal change and development, the effects of

excessive needs (including unrealistic expectations) within you or your work environment; or the effects of a coping system that is not handling the stresses placed on it.

3. What actions on my part will do the most to release the flow of creative contribution, and am I willing to take these actions?

Your answers to this question will give you a sense of what range of actions would make a difference in your case, which of these actions you see as feasible, and which of these feasible actions would produce the best results. For example, if you dislike your career but are unwilling to risk the actions necessary to change careers, are there other more acceptable actions that would rekindle the creative spark you know is there?

Needless to say, a hasty analysis will provide little in the way of useful answers. The more deliberate and thoughtful your answers to the first two questions, the more imaginative, logical, and productive your answers to the third. Every individual case of career unrest has its own convoluted pattern of precipitating factors; every case has its unique potential for corrective actions most likely to unloose blocked creativity. It takes patience and care to develop the answers that make the most sense for your situation, but there is no reason to hesitate in the face of complexity. Some analysis is better than none, and even a partial understanding of your situation can point the way to realistic steps you can take.

AN APPROACH TO CAREER UNREST

To explore career unrest, you need a systematic way of gathering and organizing information that will lead to either a quick overview or a detailed analysis of your situation.

One way of devising such an approach would be to lay out a grid that compares the three major forms of career unrest with the three major underlying conditions that cause unrest.

FIGURE 12

The Career Unrest Matrix

Causes of unrest	Forms Of Unrest: Job unrest	Career content unrest	Career self unrest
Normal change and development			
Excessive needs			
Failures in the coping system			

This grid provides a way of putting the spotlight on priorities while still keeping the whole picture in view.

APPLYING THE CAREER UNREST MATRIX: AN EXAMPLE

Suppose you are a 50 year old man bothered by a low visibility case of career unrest. If anyone asked, "Are you satisfied with your career?" you would probably reply, "Of course—I have a good job, and I've been with the same organization for twenty years." Yet within your private self you know better. You have a good job in the sense that it pays well and you know how to do the work in an acceptable

way. But it's just a job. The excitement and fun have been absent for ten years or more, and that probably means that your work has become almost all maintenance contribution and almost zero creative contribution. You would probably be incensed if someone called you a shelfsitter, yet some days that's exactly how you feel. If the prospect of remaining suspended in this tepid career bath for the next 15 years is intolerable, what kind of action can you take?

The most pragmatic answer to that question is, "Don't take any action until you've done some analysis." The following dialogue may suggest some of the information and ideas that need to be sorted through.

The Form Of Unrest

"What kind of career unrest do I have? Well, the work environment is fine, so it can't be job unrest. And the job's OK—so it must be me. Does that mean I have career self unrest?"

"Not necessarily. In fact, from the way you've described your situation, it sounds like career content unrest. Remember, it's where the dissatisfaction is focused that counts, and you seem to be locating the dissatisfaction squarely on the interaction between you and the work itself—doing the same old job in the same old way for too long."

"Yeah, it's as though my career has narrowed down—or I've let my career narrow down—to one little strip about ten feet long and six inches wide. I just keep tramping up and down over that same small territory."

The Cause Of Unrest

"How do you assess the cause of your career content unrest?"

"Well, it's partly everyday normal change and partly a coping system that just didn't pick up signals and sound an alarm."

"How do you mean, 'everyday normal change'?"

"The change that happens inside a person when you keep doing the same job the same way. You realize the fun part of work is dying out, but you never sit down and try to figure out what to do about it."

"And the coping system part?"

"I guess that's what I meant by never sitting down and letting myself know that work wasn't fun anymore and I ought to do something about that."

"Don't be too hard on yourself. When things are comfortable, it's easy to forget to take care of your creative side. Now, let's see what kind of action would make sense."

Comment

The above conversation could have taken place as an inner dialogue or as an exchange between the person and a counselor. Obviously, the conversation has been highly compressed—it would take several hours of concentrated work to arrive at the conclusions sketched in these few sentences.

Realistic corrective action would probably not require a pronounced shift in career path. Given an understanding and imaginative boss, and an organization alert to the potential contributions waiting to be set free, some less dramatic but highly productive restructuring of the work environment could very likely be worked out. Perhaps a shift in job assignment, or even a new responsibility emphasis in the present assignment might trigger a flow of fresh contribution.

Sometimes, the organization takes the initiative when this kind of slow ossification sets in. For example, an imaginative boss in a major bank uprooted a middle level executive from an all too comfortable slot and thrust him into a new environment. After the initial shock wore off, the transferred executive

saw that the new assignment offered a chance to apply his excellent interpersonal skills in a new way. Before long, he found himself spurred to a new level of activity. Everyone concerned was pleased with the change, and one senior executive was moved to observe, "We had no idea Harry had this much life left in him!"

OTHER EXAMPLES

Pinpointing the exact nature of a given career unrest situation can be difficult. There is the 28 year old MBA who sees her boss as narrow of vision and her work assignments as dull, but does not want to leave an organization she likes. Is this a straightforward case of job unrest due to work environment? A temporary case of career content unrest due to the work itself? Or is it career self unrest generated by impatient and unrealistic expectations at this stage of her career? (Saying, "My work is dull!" can sometimes be a backhanded way of saying, "I expect my work to entertain me even though I approach it in a dull and uncreative way") Whatever the true situation, productivity falls off.

Also, there is the newly promoted 30 year old manager full of restless confusion as he says to himself, "I ought to be delighted but I'm not—what's wrong?" Does this mean he is in the wrong career (career content unrest)? Or, is this a case of age-related career self unrest, where he is refocusing his early career choices? A working knowledge of Daniel Levinson's life stage theory can be helpful in tracing how different life stages affect attitudes toward career. Age does not in itself cause career unrest, but it can certainly influence the nature of career unrest.

Individuals in the conventional work world (paid employees in well structured jobs) have no monopoly on career unrest. For example, two classic cases of career content unrest lie well outside the conventional view of "career": The 40

year old woman who discovers that two healthy children and a successful, loving husband do not add up to self-fulfillment; and the 66 year old man who retired last year and hates it. Both are in careers they don't like. Both will need to apply ingenuity and careful thought to questioning the unconscious assumptions that led them to career content unrest, and to devising outlets for creative contribution.

DEFINING YOUR EXPERIENCE OF CAREER UNREST

Your experience of career unrest is as unique as your fingerprints. No one else has the particular combination of personal style and work situation that you are living with. At the same time, your experience has much in common with the career unrest of other people. Seeing these common characteristics will help you to classify your particular experience in an approximate way, and this will help you decide what sort of thinking and action would make the most sense.

Read through the following cell-by-cell description of the career unrest matrix and see if this helps you clarify what kind of unrest you have and what is causing it.

Locating Yourself in the Career Unrest Matrix

1. Job unrest from normal change and development. You used to like the place where you worked. Now you don't. Things aren't too bad, but there's something about the job environment that bothers you. It could be the people, or the physical conditions, or the geographical location, or even inanimate objects. Or, it may be that your environment is just the same as ever, but *you* have changed and this affects the way you interact with your work environment. Something has changed to make you feel different about where you work.

2. Job unrest from excessive needs. The work itself is OK, but you have angry feelings about the work environment. On Monday mornings, you're depressed about having to go back to that place. You find yourself indulging in acts of

subtle sabotage against the work environment—getting sick, coming in late, making sarcastic remarks about people at work.

Note: Don't avoid assigning your career unrest to this square of the matrix just because of its label. If it worries you to classify yourself or your work environment as having excessive needs, keep in mind that it's far better to call a spade a spade than to cover up a gradual surrender to a future of frozen creativity.

3. Job unrest from failures in the coping system. If a good friend asked you, "How do you really like your job?" you might answer, "My work's OK, and my boss and the people I work with are OK, but other people doing the same kind of work seem to have more fun. At our place, we just seem to drudge along, and I think I'm missing something."

4. Career content unrest from normal change. You used to like the work itself. Now you don't. The environment is pleasant but the work gets more and more distasteful. You don't have the old enthusiasm about work—or maybe you catch yourself forcing yourself to be enthusiastic. You realize it's been a long time since you introduced a new idea into the way you do your work. You may even have begun to ask yourself, "Do I really want to stay in this career?"

5. Career content unrest from excessive needs. You are increasingly uneasy about staying in this line of work, and when you think about this uneasiness you get the feeling that either you're demanding too much of the work or it's demanding too much of you. You're tired all the time, and you're beginning to snap at people.

6. Career content unrest from failures in the coping system. Generally speaking, you like your work, but there are parts of it that raise your anxiety to uncomfortable levels. So far, you haven't figured out what to do about it.

7. Career self unrest from normal change. This one is hard to pin down. You feel an elusive restlessness about career

and about work. No serious complaints about either work content or work environment, yet a sense that something is going on inside you that makes it hard to focus on work. You don't perform the way you used to.

8. Career self unrest from excessive needs. Other people see you as successful. You see yourself as "not good enough." If someone asked you what that means, you would answer, "Not good enough to meet the demands I place on myself."

9. Career self unrest from failures in the coping system. You have worked for several different organizations with moderate success, but you have a persistent sense of frustration about your career. Work problems and roadblocks seem overwhelming, and it's getting worse.

A WORD OF CAUTION

Many of those who experience career unrest seem to just live with it, and wish that things would get better. Hopefully, as understanding of the career unrest phenomenon grows, fewer will adopt this response. Those who do initiate action tend to assess their situations and make their decisions in one of two sharply contrasting ways: a highly intuitive, "follow your instincts" approach; or a highly rational, activist, "master your environment" approach.[1]

The intuitive approach shows a healthy willingness to keep an eye on the shifting environmental forces that are constantly opening some doors and closing others. By doing this, one avoids the pitfall of constructing a rigid inner view of the world organized around a reality that is no longer there. On the other hand, the intuitive approach is chancy, inconsistent (it is easy to remember an intuitive choice that turned out well, and easy to forget one that foundered), and certainly not teachable to others.

Individuals who apply the activist approach take responsibility for continually assessing and planning their career de-

velopment, and do this in a systematic way. They deserve credit for this. On the other hand, these same individuals often suffer from the "If I can't quantify it, or at least organize it neatly, it probably isn't important" line of thinking that tends to shut off creative ideas about managing their careers. These ideas are often hard to translate into conscious thought or into words, but they may hold the key to lasting career satisfaction.

The career unrest matrix was designed to capitalize on the strengths of each approach. Responding to the activist, rational, systematic elements in the matrix is relatively easy, since that can be done simply by following the format. Responding to the more intuitive, integrative elements may be more difficult.

Here is a suggestion for redressing this potential imbalance. Locate the position in the matrix that seems to fit your situation best, and let questions and ideas about your experience with that kind of career unrest seep in and color your thinking. Give this process plenty of time. You are looking for a theme that gives you a key insight about your career style. For example: "The best things in my career so far have come out of one aspect of my work," or "Most of the career problems and roadblocks have involved a certain kind of person that I don't seem to handle well." Then, with these themes in mind, open yourself to a possible answer (rather than unconsciously demanding an answer of yourself and feeling incompetent if one doesn't appear immediately).

The key to developing an effective approach: do your homework, then listen to the voice within.

NOTE

1. *intuitive vs. rational approach*—For a thoughtful view, see L. Eugene Thomas, "Values, mid-life reversal, and career counseling," in *Counseling And Values*, October 1978. A reprint is available from the American Personnel and Guidance Association, 1607 New Hampshire Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20009.

Chapter 12

REWARDS AND DIFFICULTIES

What The Organization Can Do

Any organization manager alert enough to see the advantages of doing something about career unrest is also alert enough to see the difficulties that lie in the way.

The rewards are clear. If career unrest constricts the desire to make a contribution, then setting free any part of that constricted desire will increase the quality and quantity of work output. In particular, this offers a way to restore the flow of creative contribution that tends to run dry in mature organizations.

But the difficulties are also clear. Since career unrest occurs in various ways, at various ages, and for various reasons, it does not lend itself to standard solutions. A Vice President of Human Resources puts it this way: "There's a lot of turmoil out there. On my worst days, I get pessimistic. I look out over the organization and I see people trying to contribute but working under a boss who is so narcissistic that he can't take the time to show them how. Or, I see people so busy with the personal problems they bring into the organization they can barely get the essentials done, let alone make a real contribution. And, believe it or not, I'm starting to see a different kind of problem—a new breed of young climbers who for some reason have decided that Theory X is the way to manage.

They get short term results, sure, but they're burning out their people.

"I suppose all these situations contain some kind of career unrest, but I don't see any single way of getting at them."

GUIDELINES

Actually, in articulating his doubts, this company officer has unconsciously begun to imply some of the guidelines for a successful approach to career unrest.

Precisely Tailored Actions, Not Grand Programs

Career unrest presents itself in such varied forms that there is indeed no single way to get at it. As organizations learn to work effectively with career unrest, they will probably find themselves developing a number of small, sharply focused efforts rather than a monolithic program complete with manuals and an introductory letter from the company president.

A Unifying Theme

There is, however, a single theme that can unify these efforts: "Let's act *as if* the discontented people in this organization—including both the mildly bored and the actively unhappy—have the potential to make contributions but don't know how. What kind of moves do we need to make to tap this potential?"

This approach does not ignore all the other motives that bring people to work, such as economic need, desire for self-gratification, and desire for self-fulfillment, but it does focus on the motive most likely to evoke sharply improved output. Why not assume a desire to contribute and concentrate on setting up conditions that will evoke that contribution?

A Few Fundamental Approaches Leading To Many Varied Solutions

A thorough understanding of career unrest provides the basis for developing a few fundamental approaches that will lead to many varied and practical solutions. As a starting point, think in terms of the career unrest matrix described in Chapter 11—three basic forms of career unrest generated by three basic causes. The examples in the next section of this chapter illustrate how an organization manager can use this matrix to select worthwhile targets and to devise actions that fit these targets.

A Disciplined View of Creativity

Actions designed to stimulate fresh thinking at all levels require some safeguards. Some care should be taken to establish the difference between carefully worked out ideas and impulsive trial and error actions. Taking the time to identify and teach a process for shaping new approaches and new methods can produce real results. Simply handing out licenses to "be creative" will produce nothing more than pseudo-creativity run wild.

SELECTIVE ACTION ON TYPICAL CAREER UNREST SITUATIONS

Following are some examples of how specific kinds of career unrest situations might be identified and approached.

Job Unrest Due to Weak Career Coping Skills

Consider what might be done by concentrating on one form of unrest generated by one basic cause of unrest. Take job unrest due to career coping skills for example. Typical symptoms of this condition show up in such complaints as, "My boss has been harassing me off and on for the past two

years"; or, "I could get ahead faster in this organization if I played the political game." There may be some truth in these complaints, but there is also a strong undertone of, "I dont know how to cope with career problems."

Careful analysis of specific cases should give some clues about which coping skills are most often missing. The next step might be a career development course available for the individual on his own time. The course would stress the individual's own responsibility for assessing what she or he has to contribute, and show how this can be done. The course would probably emphasize such points as typical career roadblocks and how to deal with them; and how to recognize the difference between skillful and unskillful coping—all of this presented in a no-nonsense, non-patronizing fashion. In most cases, it would be important to conduct this course in a way that allows candid discussion of both organizational and individual shortcomings in coping with career development barriers.

The idea would be not only to shift more emphasis for career management toward the individual, but also to do this in a way that equips the individual with the skills for recognizing and solving episodes of career unrest. Some investment along this line could do much to prevent the long term plunge in career satisfaction shown by the 35 year old Dissatisfied Stayers described in Chapter 6.

Career Content Unrest In A Stable Organization

Organizations with a high proportion of long term employees present a special set of career unrest problems, some of them well concealed. Typically, managers in these organizations are loyal, technically competent, hard working, and profit oriented. Typically also they are a rather inbred group with a strong preference for managing where the rate of change is low.

Often, all management levels in stable organizations are dominated by older managers who have spent most of their career in an environment that did not demand much in the way of cross-fertilization and new perspectives.

So long as any given department or function in that organization remains stable, a subtle career content unrest pervades its ranks. Despite a superficial appearance of energy and action, stable routines and established ways of doing things have dulled sensibilities and blocked most of the creative contribution. Organizations in government or in industries with a slow rate of change frequently experience this creeping form of career unrest, and these are the organizations particularly in need of fresh creative contribution.

Realizing the potential creative contribution bound up in this unconscious career unrest presents a special challenge. A sudden, vigorous shaking of the management tree may revive the career contributions of a few but will likely traumatize most others, reducing them to even lower productive levels. Reversing a condition built up so gradually requires a more measured (but firm and persistent) line of action—for example, informal discussions on new ways of looking at old problems, with these discussions led by someone skilled in establishing the nonthreatening yet stimulating climate that can evoke fresh thinking. Whatever the approach, it should be colored by the acknowledgement that unspoken and unwritten organization policies helped to produce the undesirable condition this action is attempting to correct.

Career Content Unrest In A Suddenly Unstable Organization

In the course of normal change and development, once stable organizations can suddenly become unstable. Public attitudes and new laws can make a sharp change in the mission of a government agency, and superior production and

marketing ideas can invade the old marketplace. Either change can bring with it a new sort of career unrest characterized by anxiety and, sometimes, near-panic: "How can I find my way in this suddenly chaotic and threatening world?"

This kind of unrest, brought on by a bewildering new turn in career content and career conditions, calls for actions that make people feel more confident about approaching unfamiliar problems. Training in the thinking and questioning skills that underlie good problem analysis and decision making would be a good start. Another big help might be expertly organized briefing sessions that put critical aspects and implications of the new situation into perspective. Both these actions would do a great deal toward structuring a new mental environment for decision making.

Career Self Unrest At Any Level In The Organization

There is considerable evidence to suggest that, at various stages of adult development, some kind of self reassessment process is a nearly universal experience, and that this reassessment often produces career self unrest. For the organization manager, career self unrest becomes a particular concern when it shows up in a way that affects work. Typically, this means unrest in the form of burnout, hesitation, or sterility. Burnout is the feeling that one's creativity has dried up; hesitation is a condition of uncertainty and increasing conservatism; sterility is a nearly complete loss of the natural pleasure to be found in work.

Tinkering with the work environment or work content does not get at the central issue underlying burnout, hesitation, and sterility. The real problem lies inside the person.

More than any other form of career unrest, career self unrest is a condition of inner questioning, of recalibrating and reconciling inner values and priorities with outer realities.

These are matters that do not lend themselves to sequential, left-brain logic, or to stern admonitions to oneself or a subordinate ("Buck up! You've handled lots of tough problems, now handle this one!")

On the other hand, waiting for the symptoms of career self unrest to heal themselves is grossly inefficient in both human and economic terms. Better to grasp the nettle and acknowledge that the most practical course of action lies in exploring the messages to and from the inner self and confronting the feelings that surround them. Usually, this process moves more quickly with professional help—not a counselor whose chief asset is a sympathetic ear, but a thoroughly trained clinician who has the skills to guide the often convoluted self exploration process. Needless to say, this must be done in a climate of total confidentiality. An individual's transactions with the inner self are none of the organization's business.

Self exploration under professional guidance can rapidly reduce career self unrest and dramatically increase creative contribution through work.

Those who find themselves indignant at this suggestion ("You'll never get me to see a shrink—I'm not crazy!") need to update their understanding. Many successful, well functioning persons use psychotherapy as a way of expanding their effectiveness, or working through stressful periods in their lives. Advances in theory and practice over the past two decades have opened many effective, relatively short-term options that have largely replaced the couch-based and sometimes agonizingly long psychoanalysis of the mid-20th century. Psychotherapy doesn't have to take forever, and it doesn't have to be a last ditch effort to avoid a nervous breakdown. Today, many normal and effective individuals seize the initiative and use psychotherapy as a tool for self exploration and self

enhancement rather than submitting to it as a desperate and humiliating admission of weakness.

SOME BROADER CONSIDERATIONS

Balancing Independence And Belonging [1]

Any line of action that purports to increase the flow of individual career contribution must provide the conditions that will make this possible. For the organization manager, this means finding fresh solutions to an age-old organizational problem: how to balance the need to be independent against the need to belong. One provides the basis for self sustenance and self direction; the other provides the basis for stability and responsiveness to society. Together, they form the framework for creative career contribution.

The vast majority of us find it very difficult to strike this balance in an increasingly urbanized, technological, polluted, tense, and changing society. The old verities about career choice, career development, and graceful retirement are undergoing change. Small wonder that the career transactions we negotiate and carry out with society, with the organization, and with our inner selves have encountered difficulties. Without new perspectives and new assumptions, organizations cannot establish the conditions for a realistic contemporary balance between independence and belonging, the kind of balance that will evoke increasing individual contribution through work.

Has Japan Already Found The Answer?

There is some evidence to suggest that Japan knows something we do not about evoking individual contribution. William Ouchi's [2] research shows that workers in a Japanese TV manufacturing plant clearly outproduce their US counterparts even though the manufacturing methods and equipment are comparable. Move the Japanese production management team to

the US and give them a US labor force and they will still outproduce comparable US managed operations.

What is their secret? Ouchi thinks it lies in the highly supportive, nurturing environment provided by Japanese organizations. They have restored the sense of community, rootedness, and belonging, the loss of which has been such a pernicious side effect of the industrial and technological revolutions. Supply the need for belonging and productivity will rise.

Supplying the need for belonging, Japanese style, goes well beyond the stereotypic understanding of "how to make the employee feel a part of the organization." The stereotypic qualities, such as a strong interest in the personal life and problems of the employee, and activities calculated to encourage group solidarity, are certainly there, but so are other less visible ingredients. Notably, there is a horizontal communication network at all levels in the organization that provides the basis for a bottom-to-top process of eliciting change from those closest to the problem. The employee who believes she or he has an opportunity to elicit productive changes in a work setting can experience a genuine sense of creative contribution.

On a much broader scale, Ezra Vogel[8] marshals evidence to support his contention that Japan has beaten the US at its own game. During the 1960s Japan overhauled its social system so effectively that it now has clearly surpassed the US in the world market. The Japanese can respond to economic opportunity in a way that is lavishly comprehensive, flexible, and worldwide in scope. Vogel sees shortcomings in the way Japan manages both individual careers and total societal movement, but he contends that there are lessons to be learned from what Japan has done, and that these lessons can no longer be

considered an optional luxury, given our current and probable future position vis-a-vis Japan.

Neither Ouchi nor Vogel proposes imitation of Japan's effort in reorganizing its society. Instead, they seem to recommend a "borrow and adapt" approach. Is this the way to a fresh solution to our problems of lagging productivity and career unrest? Maybe. Japan's meticulously intermeshed economic and political systems, its patrician approach to selecting and educating key members in various parts of those systems, and, most of all, its horizontal and bottom-to-top approach to decision making certainly deserve careful and respectful study.

However, any proposals to alleviate career unrest and bolster sagging productivity by borrowing from what Japan has done so successfully should be evaluated in terms of the differences between their country and our country, and between their situation and ours. We are the United States in the 1980s, not Japan in the 1960s.

Much of Japan's success appears to come from its heavy emphasis on the "belonging" side of the independence vs. belonging equation. On the surface, their approach seems oppressively paternalistic—a sure route to the employee passivity that goes along with deadened creativity and low productivity. The facts suggest that things are not that simple. Perhaps the typical Japanese employee's willingness to accept a slow advancement track and to give unhesitating loyalty to the organization in exchange for lifetime economic security is energized by the employer's willingness (and ability) to provide the environment for bottom-to-top decision making. The combination of long term loyalty and a consensual decision making environment foster the sort of creative contribution that allows a good original idea to be extended, reshaped, and continuously renewed over a long period of time. This

is the sort of everyday creativity that makes a significant addition to productivity. The flaw in the Japanese approach may lie in its inability to foster the original creativity that leads to new jobs and new industries. Could a reactive groundswell of frustrated individual original creativity be building in Japan? As western ideas continue to seep into Japan, will the patient willingness to stay on the slow track continue?

Doing It Our Way

But these are peripheral questions for a US organization intent on improving the productivity of its human resources. The real lesson to be emulated is Japan's willingness to commit power centers, time, and money to organizing a massive intangible resource (in this case, a nation of people attuned to consensus thinking and decision making) against problems and opportunities of great magnitude.

We cannot commit the same intangible resource because we do not have it. We are a people steeped in the adversary system, not in consensus decision making; and we are not much given to ceding individual rights to the group. Also, we live in an era of contraction, scarcity, and uncertainty, rather than in the 30s era of expansionistic thinking.

But any society and any organization willing to make the commitment can use its own intangibles as a way of energizing individual contribution. Any successful organization has at least one major strength—the ability to do one thing exceptionally well. The more precisely this strength can be identified, attuned to current environmental realities, and communicated in unmistakable terms throughout the organization, the more it can become a conduit for drawing effective contributions from individuals at all levels. The key lies in choosing the right intangible, and in finding the right ways of rewarding creative contributions toward enhancing its potential.

NOTES

1. For a view of how changing environmental conditions can create difficulties in maintaining this balance, see Richard Lingeman's *Small Town America*, New York, Putnam, 1980.

2. *Ouchi* William Ouchi, *Theory* Z: How American Business Can Meet the Japanese Challenge, Addison-Wesley, 1981.

3. Ezra F. Vogel, *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America*, Harvard University Press, 1979.

4. The US has no cause to be complacent about its capacity to foster the creativity that generates new jobs. In an earlier time, it was relatively easy to be an entrepreneur in the US. Now, it is increasingly difficult. One does not need to be an economic conservative to acknowledge that reasonable laws designed to protect the public from unfair business practices have gradually led to unfortunate restraints on the entrepreneurial exercise of C-1. A comparison with Japan on respective abilities to encourage the two different kinds of individual contribution would look like this:

	Japan	US
C-1	Weak	Formerly strong, now weak
C-2	Excellent	Average to poor

C-1 = Creative contributions that open new jobs, start new trends, begin new industries.

C-2 = Creative contributions that extend, reshape, or renew C-1 contributions.